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Desolate Era

(莽荒纪)

Book 2: The Lake in the East Mountain

Fate had never been kind to Ji Ning. Wracked by illnesses and infirm his entire life on Earth, Ning knew early on that he would die as a teenager. What he didn't know was that there really was such a thing as life after death, and that the universe was a far larger place than he thought. A lucky twist of fate (one of the few in Ning's life) meant that Ning was reborn into a world of Immortals and monsters, of Ki Refiners and powerful Fiendgods, a world where Dynasties lasted for millions of years. A world which is both greater...and yet also smaller...than he ever could imagine. He would have the opportunity to join them, and in this life, Ning swore to himself, he would never let himself be weak again! The Era he was born into was a Desolate one, but Ning would make it his era.

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Chapter 1 – Entering the City

In a connected area surrounded by large, tall fences. These fences were six meters tall and linked together tightly. Beast swarms definitely wouldn't be able to charge inside past them. Within the massive wooden fences, there were stone houses, wooden houses, and large numbers of fur-clad men, women, children, and elderly people living their lives here.

This was a very ordinary tribe with several thousand tribesmen.

"My child was captured within these few dozen kilometers!" The black-robed man walked within a mountain forest, heading towards the massive tribal gate. "And this is the tribe nearest the place he was taken from."

"Halt."

"Halt."

The main gate to the tribe was shut, and on each side there were two archer towers. Each archer tower had five powerful, beast-clad warriors within. All of them had their bows drawn and nocked, and they aimed at the distant, black-clothed man who was drawing near.

"Outsider, state your intentions." A warrior atop the archer tower said angrily.

The black-robed man glanced at him sideways, as though looking at an ant. His footsteps didn't stop, and he continued towards the gate.

The ten warriors on the archer tower all grew angry...

"Kill him!" Instantly, ten greatbows shot out at the same time! *Beng! Beng! Beng!* One arrow after another screamed through the air at the black-clothed man, each of them containing enough force to shatter boulders or make large trees collapse. But when these ten arrows drew near the black-clothed men, they all went, *zizizi*

The shafts of the arrows cracked, then disintegrated.

The man continued to walk forward.

"Not good." The ten warriors on the archer tower were alarmed, and one of them grabbed his oxhorn and gave it a mighty blow!

"Wu, wu, wu !" The deep sound from the horn was powerful and penetrative. It quickly spread to the entire tribe, and the men, women, children, and elders of the tribe all grabbed their weapons while assembling. In order to survive in this world...men, women, children, and elders all had to act as battle-hardened warriors.

When the tribesmen assembled and began to roar and charge towards the door....

Shua!

That incomparably thick black ironwood gate suddenly exploded, transforming into countless pieces of splinters that flew away. Every single splinter was more terrifying than the arrows of the tribe's archers, and in the blink of an eye, dozens of warriors located close to the door all died or were maimed. Blood stained the ground, but the warriors weren't afraid at all. Instead, they charged forward with even more furious howls.

"Hold!" A shout rang out.

A white haired old man dressed in beast fur transformed into a blur as he charged towards the empty ground in front of the door.

The enraged tribal warriors came to a halt as they looked at the white-haired old man who wore a grey beast pelt. This old man was the leader of the tribe.

"Mighty hero, might I ask, what can our Goldblade Tribe do to assist you?" The white-haired old man bowed respectfully. Someone capable of shattering their gate just through releasing his internal energy was, without a question, a Xiantian lifeform, and Xiantian

lifeforms, even amongst the local hegemon, the Ji clan, were people with extremely exalted statuses.

At this moment, the black-clothed man leisurely strolled in.

"I ask you." The black-clothed man looked at the white-haired elder. "Have there been any serpent monsters in the area recently?"

"Serpent monsters?" The white-haired old man paused, then hurriedly nodded. "There are. Recently, a serpent monster appeared, and many small tribes were devastated by it. The week following that, the tribes sent the news to the Ji clan...and the Ji clan sent their black armored riders to resolve with that calamitous snake monster."

The black-clothed man's narrow eyes flashed with cold light.

So it was indeed the Ji clan!

The Ji clan was a powerful organization in this area. Even an ancient monster like him didn't want to go bother it. He had previously guessed that it must have been the Ji clan which had captured his son Redtip, and now it seemed this was indeed the case.

"Killed or captured?" The black-clothed man continued to ask.

"Taken alive." The white-haired old man said. "The Ji clan sent their black armored riders, who captured the snake monster alive, then went back. Most likely, it is currently in West Prefecture City!"

"West Prefecture City?" The black-clothed man's eyes had a hint of fire hidden within them. The fire of rage.

West Prefecture City, to Diremonsters, was the most dangerous place possible.

That was where the experts of the Ji clan of the Western Prefecture gathered! Diremonsters didn't dare go there. If his child was there... the chance of him being able to rescue his child and bring him back was very, very low.

"Human." The black-clothed man looked at the white-haired elder. His voice was cold. "Do you know who I am?"

When the white-haired elder heard himself be addressed as 'human', his face instantly changed.

Monster!

And it was a terrifying Diremonster who could take human form!

"Huhuhu ..." The temperature suddenly dropped, and a vast layer of frost began to appear. Even plumes of snow began to drift down. The terrifying low temperature began to spread, and the surrounding tribal warriors quickly were frozen into ice, then shattered into small pieces.

"Quick, leave!" The white-haired old man's hair and eyebrows had a layer of ice form over them, and the tribesmen behind him roared, "A Diremonster! Flee, flee!"

"Quick."

"Flee."

All of the tribesmen gritted their teeth, enduring their pain and rage as they began to flee. Many other tribal warriors shouted heroically as they charged towards the black-clothed man like maddened demons, but when they got near him...the layer of frost on their bodies grew thicker, and then they quickly turned into ice statues.

The old man's internal energy was valiantly fighting. He howled out stutteringly, "You dare provoke the mighty Ji clan?"

"Provoke?" The black-clothed man's pitch-black long hair fluttered in the air. His eyes flashed with a scarlet red light. "The snake monster was my child, my most beloved child. I'm not only going to provoke them, I'm also going to break into the West Prefecture City!"

"Roaaaar!"

A world-shaking furious howl.

The black-clothed man transformed into a coiled serpent, an enormous black serpent which howevered in mid-air. The enormous scaled wings of the coiled serpent fully extended, like a massive net which blocked the sun off from the tribesmen. The tribesmen who had scattered in each direction raised their head and saw this terrifying sight, and all of them were filled with utter terror.

"It's Serpentwing!"

"It's the Diremonster of Serpentwing Lake!"

Not a single tribal warrior now had the thought of fighting back. Ever since they were born, they had heard the ancient legends of the 'Diremonster of Serpentwing Lake'. They knew how terrifying Serpentwing was. There was no way their Goldblade Clan could fight against this sort of terrifying Diremonster!

"All die!"

"All of you must die!"

The enormous Serpentwing enveloped the area below with its massive wings, bloodlust in its scarlet red eyes. It suddenly opened its massive maw and breathed. Huuuuuu. An endless, freezing black wind arose, so strong that even a layer of the ground was stripped off, and some stone houses collapsed. The large amount of black wind quickly surrounded the entire area for nearly ten kilometers around.

"Cough, cough." The tribesmen all held their throats, their bodies quickly turning pitch black.

"No." A woman held her child, tears running down her face like a river.

"Diremonster, the Ji clan will definitely avenge us!" A powerful warrior who had reached the peak of power in internal energy

stopped his own breathing, but the poisonous gas stilled penetrated through his skin. In the last moment of his life, all he could do was let out this bitter shout.

Soon....

The territory of the Goldblade Tribe turned into a desolate, silent wasteland. Not a hint of life or sound. All of the tribesmen of the Goldblade Tribe had been turned to ice statues, shattered into pieces, or poisoned to death. The entire area for ten kilometers around...had turned into a charnel house. Even poisonous bug-type creatures had been poisoned to death.

The enormous Serpentwing gently flapped its wings as it stared below. After sensing that all life was gone, it casually flew away at high speed, disappearing into the sky.

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Night descended. A cold wind blew drearily. The distant, massive West Prefecture City stretched off into the distance.

“Swoosh !” A black shadow easily flashed past the walls, avoiding the patrolling black armored riders and stealthily entering the city.

“My child, where are you?”

The black-clothed man began to search within West Prefecture City.

This was the first time the Diremonster, Serpentwing, had entered West Prefecture City. After investigating for a long time, he discovered, to his pain, “Monsters that are taken alive are all delivered to the inner city. And the inner city is the place where the Ji clan lives. It is guarded very tightly. There are many Xiantian lifeforms living there...there is no way I can sneak in.”

Sneaking into West Prefecture City was fairly easy.

Sneaking into the inner city?

That was the place where the clan members of the Ji clan lived. How exceedingly tight did the security of such a place have to be?

“Hu!”

A moment later.

In the air above the West Prefecture City, Serpentwing flew high into the sky while at the same time, using its natural-born ability to control water, it quickly created a large amount of fog and clouds with the moisture in the air. The fog surrounded the nearby area, and he secretly stared down below from the skies, carefully watching every single place.

Past midnight.

Ning was by himself in Dragon Castle. Today was the day for his once every three days cage battle.

“Young master.”

“Young master.”

The black armored riders and some servants of Dragon castle were all extremely respectful to him.

Ning's father was the number one expert of the Ji clan! And Ning himself was extremely talented, so many people had already begun to believe...Ning would be the next Prefecture Lord. One could imagine how exalted his status was.

“Prepare the most formidable monster.” Ning laughed and called out.

“Recently, we had a powerful monster delivered here. It was brought to us by Commander Blindfish. It has the lineage of the Fiendgods.” A one-armed old man called out loudly.

“A monster with Fiendgod lineage?” Ning revealed a hint of delight

on his face. "Excellent. Today I'll be able to have a fun fight then. Quick, arrange for it to be sent to the cage."

"Alright."

The one-armed old man went to make the arrangements.

Dragon Castle was divided into the cage and the beast tunnels. Naturally, the beast tunnels was where the monsters lived, all of which were kept in captivity here.

"Roaaar!" The massive red serpent wrapped up in chains, upon seeing the human in the massive cage outside, let out a deep, angry growl.

"Keep shouting." The one-armed old man sneered coldly. "You ate so many humans. Today is the day of your death. Go. Open the door, and then release the chains...let it enter the cage."

"Yes."

The servants who had been installed here for the purposes of taking care of the monsters went to make the arrangements.

"Rumble ." After opening the gate between the cage and the beast tunnels, a faint, glimmering light could be seen from afar. The giant red snake instantly looked over and began to let out a growling sound.

"Release the chains." The one-armed elder ordered.

"Clank."

"Clank ."

One chain after another was released. Feeling the layers of chains on its body quickly loosen, the giant red snake couldn't help but begin to wriggle, making the chains rattle against each other. After the last one was released...with a clanking sound, the entire chain

apparatus fell to the floor with a loud sound.

The giant red snake stared coldly at the one-armed elder, and then slithered its way at high speed out of the tunnel towards the place which had just been opened to it. It quickly arrived in the cage outside.

Within the enormous cage...

A red-lipped, white-toothed, fur-clad young man was staring at it from afar. The giant red snake's saliva instantly began to drool out. Given the extensive man-eating experience it had, it had the sudden knowledge...that this sort of human youngster's flesh was definitely the most tender and most delicious of them all.

Chapter 2 - Mercy

Ning stared at the distant giant red snake and he softly murmured, "The entire body is blood red, but the scales around the chest are bright silver, and a pair of red eyes...oh, and it has two claws as well?"

"*Slitherslitherslither...*" The giant red snake slowly began to move. Its enormous serpentine head raised high as it stared at Ning. Its natural-born arrogance caused it to hold the human youth in front of it in no regard at all. According to its experience, those people in the tribes like this youth were all very weak. Even though this was the lair of the Ji clan, this sort of youth shouldn't be that strong.

Ning let out a light harrumph.

The air in his chest came out as he breathed, shaping into two streams of energy that were visible to the naked eye. His entire body turned slightly red, and a powerful aura began to emanate from him. The distant giant red snake was startled. He could suddenly sense this young man in front of him had a terrifying aura that was no weaker than its own.

"Recently, I haven't had a lot of practice with the [Raindrop Sutra]. I'll use you to train it." Ning suddenly moved forward by several dozen meters, the sharp sword in his hand stabbing out at the giant scarlet snake at lightning speed.

The giant scarlet snake sent its two massive sharp claws at its thorax directly towards Ning in an arcing slash.

"*Shua! Shua! Shua!*" Sword flashing hundreds of times like a fog of light, one stab after another was delivered towards the giant red snake. The giant red snake only dodged three sword attacks aimed at its vitals, taking the rest of the attacks head on. Only a few white spots appeared on its scales. This caused the giant red snake to unconsciously underestimate the strength of this young human by a

bit.

"Wu....."

A strange rumble sound. It was the sound of Ning's sharp sword slashing through the air, instantly slashing towards the giant red snake's chest, suddenly creating a two meter long massive wound. The scales split open, and the muscles beneath were torn apart, and fresh red blood instantly spewed out.

"Roaaar!" The giant red snake was instantly shocked. How was it that the youth in front of him had suddenly become so powerful?

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Ning was no longer the callow youth who had battled against the Howling Moonwolf. His constant battles against monstrous beasts had given him much experience. Right now, he was actually only using half of his strength, but because the [Shadewind Steps] and the [Raindrop Sutra] all were quite exquisite in the application of force, he still wasn't at any disadvantage.

First, Ning utilized a chain of attacks, 'Drizzling Rain', but against this giant red snake, it proved useless.

Then, Ning used the vicious, powerful killing attack, 'Rain Line', which was the technique Ning used to leave that massive, large wound on the giant red snake.

Next, Ning used the penetrating 'Raindrop Pierces Rocks' attack.

Following that, Ning blocked the wild attacks of the giant red snake by using the technique, 'Thin Streams Flow Forever'.

The [Raindrop Sutra] had a total of nine stances.

These stances were, 'Drizzling Rain', 'Tempest Curtain', 'Thin Streams Flow Forever', 'Watertight', 'Rain Line', 'Eternally Fresh Waterflow', 'Merciless Waterflow', and 'Raindrop Pierces Rocks'!

Some were attack stances, some were defensive stances.

Even the attack stances, however, included defensive components. The profoundness of this technique constantly caused Ning to sigh in amazement and be mesmerized. After all, he hadn't even reached the level of 'expertise' in this technique, and although his own father, Yichuan, had reached the level of 'mastery' long ago, his father was still studying the [Raindrop Sutra], because the more one reflected on the [Raindrop Sutra], the more one realized how boundless its scope was.

"This technique, 'Thin Unending Waterflow', should be an unrestrained, free-willed attack." Under the attacks of this monstrous beast with Fiendgod lineage, Ning occasionally had some insights with regards to his sword techniques.

But the giant red snake, by contrast, was growing furious!

It could tell that this human youth was using it to train in swordplay. Although there were many wounds on its body already, none of them were lethal. But the youth in front of him had only suffered a few light wounds...which instantly healed in the blink of an eye. The youth in front of it was so terrifying that its heart quailed, while at the same time, it felt fear that it was going to die at the hands of this human youth.

But even if it was going to die, its inborn arrogance and pride wouldn't allow it to be toyed with to death.

"Roaaaaar." The giant red snake suddenly let out a wild, earthshaking howl, filled with rage, unwillingness, and carried with it the knowledge of its death.

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The howl split the air.

In the air above the inner reaches of the Ji clan, there were many clouds. Within one of the clouds was the black Winged Snake.

"Roaaaar."

By the time this howl made it to the heavens, it was very weak, but Serpentwing was an extremely sensitive Diremonster. In addition, the roar was the familiar voice of its child.

"It is Redtip! My son!" Serpentwing was instantly certain of this. It had been searching around the inner city the entire time, and from kilometers away, its gaze had clearly made out the building known as the Cage. But because of the fog and because of all the steel chains above the cage, it simply couldn't tell what the Cage actually was.

But just at that moment...

Upon hearing the sound, it immediately knew that the sound was coming from that cage area!

"There it is!" Serpentwing immediately charged down, its body still wrapped by clouds and fogs, shrouding it from view.

....

Within the cage.

Ning, hearing the grief-stricken, enraged howl of the giant red snake, knew how the giant red snake was feeling. Immediately, a sharp sword appeared in his left hand as well. "Since you beg for death, then die!"

Shua !

Ning suddenly transformed into a tempest and charged at the giant red snake.

Sword light flashed!

[Thunderflame Sword] – Thunderflash Flint! Blazing Thunderclap!

[Raindrop Sutra] – Merciless Waterflow! Raindrop Pierces Rocks!

Shua!

The red eyes in the upraised head of the giant red snake slowly dimmed. There was a deep hole in its head now, which had pierced straight through its skull. And then, its massive body collapsed to the ground like a pile of mud, causing the earth to shake. Fresh blood flowed outwards, staining the ground in a river of red blood.

“Mm.” Ning looked at the corpse of the massive red snake, then inspected its wound.

He was studying how effective his killing blow had been.

“Blazing Thunderclap truly is a powerful attack. It actually drilled such a massive hole into the snake’s chest. It almost split the snake in half.” Ning nodded as he continued to inspect the damage.

“Merciless Waterflow and Thunderflash Flint can both be described in one word; fast! Merciless Waterflow is both fast and agilely unpredictable, while Thunderflash Flint is fast and explosive.”

“Raindrop Pierces Rocks has good penetrative ability. It was easily able to pierce through this snake’s skull.” Ning nodded.

In the air above the cage, a massive creature was descending through the clouds. Compare to Serpentwing, his child, Redtrip, was nothing more than a tadpole! Serpentwing’s scarlet eyes could already see through the chains of the cage to the scene below. It saw the desolate, miserable sight of the blood-splattered serpent corpse lying on the soft earth, and as it saw this, it felt a terrible fire suddenly fill its consciousness.

“My child!”

Serpentwing had gone totally mad. “Human, pay for my child’s death!”

Bang!

The powerful energy vibrations coming from above the cage made

Ning raise his head to take a look.

"What?!" Ning immediately saw that hundreds of meters away, within the clouds, an enormous serpent with barely visible pair of giant wings was staring at him. The creature was currently charging downwards at him...its wingspan alone was larger than the entire cage.

The red-eyed snake's eyes were filled with boundless killing intent. Ning was shocked, and he understood...that the creature charging down from above was here to kill him!

"Not good. Flee!"

Ning turned his head and immediately wanted to flee!

But just as he wanted to flee, he realized that the corridor he had come through had been shut. Generally speaking, during cage battles, they would always be shut, to prevent someone from fleeing before the battle was over! Only after obtaining victory would Ning order people to open the tunnel...but he just killed the giant red snake moments ago, and hadn't had the chance to give the order yet.

In addition, as he had started the cage battle, he had forbidden others from watching him. Generally speaking, only his father watched.

After all, his true power was something that had remained a secret all along. For example, the fact that he used twin swords or that he could use ordinary swords to kill a peak Houtian level Godbeast... these were all secrets. The outside world still believed that Ning relied on sharp precious weapons to slay Godbeasts.

"Shua !!" "Shua !!" Ning immediately threw away the two swords in his hands, and instantly, two more swords appeared; the Darknorth swords!

"Break!"

Ning exploded forth with all his power, hacking away at the thick chains above him, while also calling out frantically at the top of his lungs, "FATHER!"

The sound rang out, but the speed of sound was actually slower than the downward charging speed of Serpentwing.

"Dangdangdang!" Ning's Darknorth swords wildly chopped against the steel chain net up above. In the past, his father, Yichuan had said this: "Given your strength...if you are to use the power within the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] and use your full strength, you should be able to break apart the chains. But a web like this formed from many chains...you will probably need the span of ten breaths before you are able to break enough chains to escape."

But now that Ning had the Darknorth swords. They were indeed sharp. Dangdangdang...one chain after another was shattered, but there were simply too many of them. To break enough to allow him to escape would probably require the span of one breath.

One breath?

The terrifying creature charging from above wouldn't even need a second before arriving!

"No time." Even as Ning was chopping the steel chains, he immediately understood this.

The massive scaled wings sliced through the air, striking against the chain of webs. These steel chains, which were incomparably tough for Ning, were extremely feeble in the face of this attack of a thousand year old monster. With a series of shattering sounds, countless chains broke apart and flew everywhere. And then, the scaled wings swept directly against Ning.

"Pay with your own life for my son's!" Serpentwing's red eyes stared wildly at Ning.

“Dodge.”

Twin swords in his hands, Ning quickly dodged while at the same time, using the same technique with both swords; ‘Thin Unending Waterflow’. His sword flashed, receiving the scaled wing that came from above.

One layer of sword flash after another intersected, and both swords combined, forming an endless web of sword light. It was as though multiple layers of silk were being wrapped around the opponent’s attack, restricting it.

He launched ten of these attacks in a row!

“Bang!” The massive scaled wing smashed down upon the twin Darknorth swords, and the power of this strike caused Ning to instantly feel the bones in his wrists splitting apart. And then, the blade-like edges of the wing cleaved down upon the dodging Ning, slashing straight through the Goldstar Shirt.

Pu!

Fresh blood sprayed out, and his left arm, still clutching a Darknorth sword, went flying. Ning’s entire body was sent smashing into the blackwater iron wall, creating a human-shaped impression into the wall. Ning vomited out a large mouthful of blood from his lips.

“Hu!” Serpentwing raised its scaled wings again, preparing to deal yet another cleaving blow.

“This is the moment!”

The now one-armed Ning gritted his teeth, then suddenly scurried out like a massive grasshopper through the broken cage. [Shadewind Steps]. He used this footwork technique to its absolute limits, flashing out like a streak of azure light, fleeing outside.

“Die!” A violent wind attacked.

Looking behind him, Ning saw an enormous black blur sweep towards him. That was the massive serpent tail of Serpentwing. This whipping attack by Serpentwing's tail was even faster and even fiercer than the attack of his scaled wings! The air it passed through exploded with terrifying sonic booms, and the tough marble stones of Dragon Castle began to split apart...

The enormous black tail was everywhere, surrounding Ning. Given Ning's speed, there was simply no way he would be able to dodge this attack at all.

"I'm finished!"

Chapter 3 -Life and Death

Within his courtyard, Yichuan was currently wielding a blue longsword, chopping and piercing against a tree trunk. Chop, pierce, scrape, slice...he only used these most basic of movements and didn't even use much force, and so the tree trunk only had some scratches appear on its surface.

His wife, Snow, held a bottle of water nearby, watching her man train with a smile on her face, occasionally sprinkling some water on the nearby flowers and grass.

"Hrm?" Yichuan and Snow simultaneously turned to look in the same direction. Both of them sensed a vibration of energy.

"Dragon Castle."

Yichuan and Snow simultaneously leaped onto the rooftop of the building, staring at the distant Dragon Castle.

Dragon Castle was built in a fairly out-of-the-way location in the inner city, at least two kilometers or so away from where Yichuan and his wife lived.

They saw...

In the air above Dragon Castle was the enormous Serpentwing. Serpentwing's scaled wings were currently covering the entirety of Dragon Castle, and a bloodstained youth with only one arm was scurrying out of Dragon Castle at high speed, while an enormous draconic tail flashed towards him like lightning.

Snow's eyes instantly turned red. She let out an agonized howl.
"Ning!"

But the distance was too far.

There was no time at all!

"Vermin!" Yichuan exploded with anger, letting out a sudden, ferocious chop with the blue sword in his hands. Hua! A brilliant wave of blue light flew out from his sword. The three hundred meter long wave of blue light was even slightly larger than Serpentwing itself! It slashed through the air, chopping directly towards Serpentwing.

Pengpengpeng !

The distant tail of Serpentwing, in the blink of an eye, was struck dozens of times. The entire Dragon Castle exploded and collapsed, sending large amounts of rocks flying everywhere. Many of the servants, guards, and members of the Ji clan who lived around Dragon Castle were injured or wounded, and their blood splashed everywhere. Even some of the monstrous beasts inside the beast tunnels were killed by the impact.

.....

Just as Ning scurried out of the cage, he was attacked by the massive tail of the serpent.

Ning knew that in front of this Winged Snake monstrosity, the Goldstar Shirt of his might as well have been paper. All he had was a peak Houtian level Fiendgod body....he probably would be smashed into a pile of pulverized flesh in an instant.

"No."

Ning simply couldn't accept this. In this life, he had such a healthy, strong body, had a pair of doting parents, and had the chance to train to become an Immortal, to control his own destiny. He had trained for so long...and everything was just starting. He truly couldn't accept this!

"Dodge!" Ning used the [Shadewind Steps] with all his might.

Quick, quicker, quicker!

"Hu!"

"Hu!"

The wind was howling!

Hu! Ning's body was howling as well!

"*Bang!*" The serpent's tail came smashing down. It scraped past Ning, then smashed against the thick marble rocks of Dragon Castle. Instantly, the entire Dragon Castle had shuddered and large amounts of marble rock had shattered and been sent flying everywhere.

"You managed to dodge?" The red-eyed Serpentwing howled, "You were lucky enough to dodge once, but do you think you'll dodge twice?"

Bang!

The serpent tail swung down at him again!

But Ning was like a piece of paper, fluttering about in the breeze, as agile as the wind, as unpredictable as a shadow. The serpent tail once again missed Ning, smashing against Dragon Castle once more.

"Impossible!" Serpentwing was now truly enraged.

It was a Diremonster who had trained for thousands of years and had reached the late-stage Xiantian level. It was many times more powerful than those ordinary early-stage Xiantian Diremonsters. For someone of its power, killing a youth should be simplicity itself, much like how it has easily slaughtered those thousands of tribesmen in the Goldblade Tribe.

Pengpengpeng! Serpentwing wildly struck everywhere with its tail, and its wings struck out as well. The entire Dragon Castle was shuddering and on the verge of collapse, and large amounts of stones were flying everywhere. Many servants and black armored

riders lost their lives...

"Diediedie!" Serpentwing was frantic.

A wild cold aura emanated from him, and the temperature dropped, causing some servants to immediately freeze to death.

The black poisonous mist came out, and the surrounding Houtian level lifeforms all were poisoned to death.

But Ning continued to dodge time and time again in that massive cloud of dust.

The cold aura could freeze to death those peak Houtian Ki Refining warriors, but Ning, who trained in the Fiendgod Body Refining technique, his body was more than a hundred times stronger than those Houtian Ki Refiners. These large-scale cold air and poison gas attacks couldn't harm him at all.

"Like the wind. Like the shadows."

"Shadewind Steps."

"This is the Shadewind Steps. The true Shadewind Steps." Ning totally immersed himself in it, allowing those strikes from the enormous Serpentwing to come as they will, allowing the scaled wings to slash at him as they pleased. He simply followed the natural force of the wind and borrowed it, and also the force of the wind created by his opponent, Serpentwing, to dodge agilely time and time again.

He moved like a shadow. Serpentwing couldn't hit him, no matter how he tried.

He moved like the wind. Ning's body flickered everywhere with such gentle ease, as though he were a leaf that was being blown by the gentle wind.

"One with the world!"

"This youngster has actually reached the level of 'one with the world'? His footwork is at the 'one with the world' level?" The vicious, otherworldly ancient monster, Serpentwing, was finally certain that this human youth who had killed his son had actually reached the level of 'one with the world'. This was a level which this old monster hadn't reached yet, despite having trained for thousands of years."

One with the world!

Generally speaking, only Zifu Disciples were at the 'one with the world' level, while some powerful Xiantian lifeforms would also reach the 'one with the world' level.

Humans naturally had a greater potential for insight than monsters!

Only the likes of Godbeasts were on par with humans in terms of understanding.

"Damnable." The ancient monster, Serpentwing, knew that in a short period of time, he wouldn't be able to kill this human youth.

"Vermin!"

An enormous blue sword light attacked.

The ancient monster, Serpentwing, swung his tail towards that blue sword light, not caring about it at all. "Yichuan, do you think that your sword light can harm me from a distance of two kilometers?"

Bang!

Dark green blood splattered everywhere, and wherever the blood splattered, the ground hissed and bubbled. The marble and the blackwater iron all quickly dissolved. That enormous, thick tail had been cut so deeply, it was nearly severed in half.

"How could it be this powerful?" Serpentwing was truly frightened.

The number one expert of the Ji clan's West Prefecture truly was too

terrifying.

"Hu!"

"I'll let you live for now!" Serpentwing tossed Ning a furious glare, and then with a beat of its two wings, flew into the sky at high speed.

"Vermin!"

"Serpentwing, you dare to barge into the Ji clan's West Prefecture, and you think you can flee?"

"Die!"

From multiple areas in the inner city, there erupted furious roars, including those of Ji Lee and Ji Young, as well as dozens of Xiantian lifeforms, all of whom shouted at him.

"Loan me your Azure Firebird." Yichuan transformed into a ray of light, flying onto a giant blue bird that was in mid-flight, which had a blue fire blazing on its tail. On the back of this blue bird, there was a woman dressed in black.

"Yichuan, I'll come with you." The black-clothed woman said in her hoarse voice.

"Let's go."

Yichuan swept the area below with his gaze. Seeing his son standing within the rubble of Dragon Castle, he couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief...but seeing the bloodstained severed arm of his son, he felt his fury blaze up once more.

"Hu !"

Yichuan and the black-clothed woman, riding the Azure Firebird, tore through the air, pursuing in the direction of the fleeing Serpentwing. As for the other Xiantian level people in the West Prefecture, all of them were roaring with fury. A Diremonster had dared to barge into

the inner city of the Ji clan's West Prefecture City? This was totally against all reason!

But humans at the Xiantian level were not capable of flight yet, and so they could only watch as Yichuan and his companion flew on the back of the Azure Firebird in pursuit of Serpentwing.

.....

Ning remained within that state of being 'one with the world'. He could sense the strength of the wind, and he could borrow that strength to become as carefree as the wind itself. He could even borrow the attacking strength of the enemy to dodge the enemy's attacks, as though he were the enemy's shadow.

"Ah."

"Ah!"

A feeble moan caused Ning to look around him. The entire Dragon Castle had been reduced to rubble. A large number of servants and black armored riders had died gruesome deaths, either smashed, frozen, or poisoned to death. The sight was unbearable to see.

The joy he felt at having the 'one with the world' level of the [Shadewind Steps] faded away.

Ning ground his teeth. With a leap, he entered the field of rubble. He began kicking aside pieces of rock, and quickly found his severed left arm, then re-absorbed the Darknorth sword his left arm was clutching back into his kaledstone. And then, Ning grabbed his severed left arm with his right arm, pressing it against the stump. By now, the severed stump was no longer bleeding any more.

"Connect." Ning connected the severed arm to the stump, and then extended the Goldstar Shirt to quickly encapsulate his left arm as well, putting it back into position.

Even in his previous life, a severed hand or arm that had only been

severed recently could be reattached.

Ning currently had the body of a Fiendgod. A severed arm only needed a few hours to be regrown, much less a severed arm that was being reattached...Ning could clearly sense his muscles and flesh rapidly grow back, and his bones were quickly reaching out and connecting as well. His arm had already been reattached, but he would still need a little bit longer before reaching his perfect state.

"Ning!" A somewhat frantic sound rang out.

Ning raised his head up. He saw an old man who wore a dark red beast fur pelt standing in the rubble looking down at him. This man was the Prefecture Lord, Ji Young. Prefecture Lord Young saw that Ning was unharmed, and only then let out a sigh of relief. "As long as you aren't hurt. As long as you aren't hurt."

"Ning." An agonized shout.

Ning didn't have the chance to speak with the Prefecture Lord. He hurriedly made his way out from the debris field, and saw from far away his mother running towards him, her face covered with bitter tears.

"Mother." Ning called out repeatedly.

Seeing her son standing there, Snow instantly began to shed tears of joy. Ning quickly ran towards his mother at high speed, then hugged her. Snow hugged her son back. "Wonderful, wonderful. I was so frightened just now. If anything had happened to you, I really don't know what I would've done."

"Mother, I'm fine." Ning said repeatedly.

"Your arm?" Snow looked carefully at her son's left arm.

"It's fine. Look." Ning waved his left arm around. The bones and flesh of his left arm had been totally connected by now, and even the cells had been 80% regenerated. Most likely, in just a little bit longer, he

would be in perfect condition.

Only now did Snow completely relax. She knew how powerful her son's recuperative ability was, as a Fiendgod Body Refiner.

"What happened? How could this Diremonster, Serpentwing, dare to have the temerity to attack our Ji clan's Western Manor?" A heroic voice rang out, and the red-haired viper elder, Ji Lee, came running over, his face filled with fury. "This vermin is asking to be killed. Also, we need to immediately investigate why it charged and attacked our Ji clan's Western Prefecture City."

"It is indeed strange. Doesn't Serpentwing know that by acting in such a way, it has fully infuriated the Ji clan of the Western Prefecture?" A skinny old man with a scar over his forehead said coldly.

One Xiantian individual after another walked over.

Seeing the destroyed Dragon Castle and the large number of corpses and bloodstains, the dozens of Xiantian individuals had very ugly looks on their faces. As the administrators of this large expanse of land, it had been a long time since a Diremonster had dared to attack the West Prefecture. Every single expert of the Ji clan of the Western Prefecture felt both fury and shame.

"It must die!"

"We absolutely must kill that Diremonster, Serpentwing."

"Kill it!"

Chapter 4 -Yichuan's Rage

The flames on the plumage of the Azure Firebird swirled around it as it flew in the skies, the desolate winds howling past it as it chased after that giant scaled and winged serpent.

On the back of the Azure Firebird were two figures who were each half-kneeling; Ji Yichuan, and that black-clothed woman. The black-clothed woman stared at the rapidly fleeing Serpentwing. "Yichuan, this Serpentwing is a late-stage Xiantian level Diremonster. It is quite a bit stronger than my Azure Firebird. Although the Azure Firebird is good at long-distance flight, it'll still be hard to catch up.

"Lady Flower, I'll handle this." Yichuan's face was as cold as ice. From within his hands, a silver greatbow suddenly appeared out of nowhere, while in his left hand was an arrow.

Hua....

The bow was fully drawn. Yichuan stared coldly at the fleeing Serpentwing.

"Swish!" The arrow suddenly transformed into a ray of light, streaking towards the fleeing Serpentwing. At such a short range, the terrifying speed at which Yichuan had launched this arrow, combined with Serpentwing's massive body, meant that there was no way it could dodge.

In terms of pure archery skill, Yichuan was perhaps inferior to Blindfish.

But most of the men of the Ji clan were skilled in archery, and this arrow of Yichuan's...in terms of speed, was even faster than Blindfish's!

"Bang!"

The arrow struck Serpentwing's body, then instantly exploded,

creating an enormous, bloody hole. A massive, bone-exposing wound was revealed on the serpent's body, and it seemed as though with just one more arrow, this serpent would completely explode from the inside. Actually, Yichuan's arrow had been aimed at those bony wings. But Serpentwing knew...once his scaled, bony wings were injured, he wouldn't be able to flee. Thus, he had used his own serpentine body to block the arrow instead.

"Crackle..." The flesh on the serpent's body quickly closed, and blood stopped flowing.

Serpentwing continued to flee wildly.

"Yichuan, your Ji clan killed my son. Can it be that you won't let me seek revenge?" Serpentwing shouted backwards.

"Vermin, if you let yourself die peacefully, I'll let you die fast. Otherwise, I'll make sure you regret it." Half-kneeling on the back of the Azure Firebird, Yichuan once more nocked that silver greatbow.

Serpentwing hurriedly moved to dodge.

Bang!

Yet another arrow blasted against Serpentwing's body. Serpentwing howled in agony, and his heart was frantic. "Yichuan is the number one expert of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture, true, but how can he be this powerful? Earlier, from the great distance of two kilometers, the sword flash of Yichuan's had still been powerful enough to injure me severely. And now, a single arrow of his can injure me. Even a peak Xiantian-level Diremonster is only at most able to hold me down; there's no way one would be able to demolish me so easily!"

Serpentwing's courage had been entirely shattered by that sword flash from earlier.

A sword flash that could heavily injure him despite having come from over two kilometers away.

If it was executed at a closer distance, wouldn't it have killed him in one blow?

"*Swish!*!" "*Swish!*!" "*Swish!*!" Yichuan fired one arrow after another, and Serpentwing could only grit his teeth and use his body to block it. Fortunately, his massive body was hundreds of meters long. Although his enormous body now had over ten massive craters in it, given his powerful life force, he could still maintain his high speed flight.

Soon, the wide expanse of earth below gave way to a wide lake.

"*Hu!*!" Serpentwing immediately charged downwards.

"Serpentwing Lake." Yichuan and the black-clothed woman's faces both changed.

Serpentwing Lake was over a hundred kilometers long. One couldn't even see the ends of the lake...and what's more, it was Serpentwing's lair.

Hua ...

The enormous Serpentwing plummeted down from the skies, diving into the lake. A few large waves arose, but the creature itself had disappeared.

As for the Azure Firebird, it continued to hover in the air above Serpentwing Lake.

"Yichuan, what should we do?" The black-clothed woman asked.

"Fled?" Yichuan stood on the back of the Azure Firebird, staring down at the massive lake. He said coldly, "He thinks that just because he is hiding in the water that I won't be able to do anything to him? Lady Flower, loan me the Azure Firebird for now. I'd like to trouble you, Lady Flower, to immediately return to the West Prefecture...and have my spirit-beast, the serpent, come over.

"Alright." The black-clothed woman nodded.

Swish!

The black-clothed woman transformed into a streak of light, flashing across the surface of the lake, then disappearing into the distance.

....

In the depths of Serpentwing Lake.

The enormous Serpentwing lay coiled at the bottom, occasionally licking some of its enormous wounds with its tongue. His enormous life force and regenerative force was causing his wounds to quickly grow stronger, and his flesh was visibly regrowing and extending.

"Ji Yichuan." Serpentwing's eyes were filled with disbelief. "How can he be this powerful? That Ji Lee is the number two expert of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture. In the past, when we fought against each other, he only had somewhat of an advantage over me...but most likely, if this Yichuan is allowed to draw close to me, he would be able to kill me with one blow of his sword. How can the difference be this great?"

Before this, Serpentwing had been confident in his fleeing abilities. As he viewed it, he was a late-stage Xiantian-level Diremonster. Even if he ran into a terrifying peak Xiantian-level creature...he would at most be at an disadvantage. He would still be able to flee. As long as he wasn't attacked by an entire group of Xiantian life forms, he should be fine.

But that sword of Yichuan's had scared him silly.

"Groooowl."

"Gaaaaaa!"

The monsters within Serpentwing Lake all began to howl fiercely. This sound instantly caused great shock to Serpentwing, deep within

the waters of the lake. He could understand those monstrous cries.

"A Diremonster has come?" Serpentwing was greatly shocked. "Right, one of the Diremonsters that the Ji clan of the West Prefecture has tamed is a water-type Diremonster."

Some monsters were avian-types, skilled at flight.

Others were water-types, extremely powerful in the water.

Some non-water races, upon entering the water, would see their power drop! For example, Yichuan...in the water, his speed probably would be less than a tenth of his usual speed. But in the water, Serpentwing would be even faster than on land! Even if Yichuan were to use his sword techniques, with the water blocking him, the power of his techniques would be much lower as well.

Of course, although the power of Yichuan's sword techniques would be greatly reduced, he could still kill Serpentwing! The problem was that in the water, he would be completely unable to catch Serpentwing. No matter how powerful his sword techniques were, it would be of no use.

....

"Brother Black, go search and find that Serpentwing." Yichuan stood on the surface of the lake, but didn't sink down at all. "Although he is more powerful than you, he is badly wounded. In addition, after finding him, you just need to tie him down for a while and prevent him from escaping. I will immediately charge over and slay him."

"Leave it to me." The coiled black serpent nodded on the surface of the lake, then immediately sank its entire body into the depths, beginning to search within Serpentwing Lake.

Those lesser monsters in the lake all fled in every direction, screaming in terror.

"Azure Firebird." Yichuan looked at the Azure Firebird above him.

"Stay up there and keep a lookout. Once Serpentwing flees from the lake, immediately chase after and kill him."

"Alright." The Azure Firebird spoke in a soft voice, then rose at a high speed.

Yichuan's face was grim. Wielding his blue longsword, he paced about on the surface of the lake as though it were flat land. One step at a time, he walked, leaving faint ripples on the surface. His cold gaze stared at his surroundings, as though he could see straight through the lake water to the depths of the lake.

.....

Ji clan's West Prefecture.

It was dark now, and the commotion caused by Serpentwing's attack in the Ji clan's West Prefecture had died down as well.

"Father." Ji Jadewich, his hair parted into dozens of braids, was seated on his knees. After draining all of the wine in his beast-skull goblet, he said, "Serpentwing, that Diremonster, has already fled back to his lair. Serpentwing Lake is extremely large, and so deep that the bottom cannot be seen. If it makes up its mind to hide, a single black serpent searching by itself will find it hard to locate him. Although Yichuan is extremely powerful, it will still be very hard for him to kill that Serpentwing."

Lee nodded, but he was frowning. He hadn't touched any of the wine or meat in front of him. Clearly, he was frustrated by something.

"Father?" Jadewich looked questioningly at his father.

Frowning, Lee let out a low sigh. "His sword flash travelled a distance of over two kilometers, but was still able to heavily wound Serpentwing, a Diremonster. The power of that sword has essentially surpassed the limits which a Xiantian lifeform can attain."

"Father, do you mean to say..." Jadewich was shocked. "Zifu Disciple?"

Lee shook his head. "Hard to say! If Yichuan had opened his Zifu, the 'Violet Palace', then he should be able to fly about on magic treasures. He wouldn't just stand there and watch as that Serpentwing, which almost slew his son, turn tail and run away. But if he hasn't opened his Zifu...the power of his sword attack remains ridiculously large. Thus, I feel puzzled and unable to understand it."

"Also!"

"I saw that Ji Ning had his arm severed, but in the blink of an eye, by the time the dust had settled and I rushed over there, Ning was totally fine." Lee was frowning.

Many Xiantian-level people had seen Ning's severed arm lying there in the rubble.

"The son of Ji Yichuan, Ji Ning, should be training in some sort of Fiendgod Body Refining." Jadewich nodded. "In addition, he has already reached an exceedingly high level, for him to be able to re-connect a severed arm. Only, I am puzzled...how did Ning manage to survive the attack of Serpentwing on Dragon Castle?"

"I don't understand either." Lee sighed. "I suppose he is lucky."

Why was Ning able to survive?

Perhaps it was because Serpentwing knew who Ning was and thus was afraid to kill him.

Perhaps it was because Ning had powerful lifeforce as a Fiendgod Body Refiner and thus was luckily able to survive.

Perhaps it was because Ning had some sort of protective treasure given to him by his parents.

The experts of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture were all abuzz, guessing wildly over the reason, but none of them guessed that the merely ten year old Ning had already reached the level of 'one with the world' in terms of footwork.

.....

Ning was currently in the middle of his training area, displaying his Shadewind Steps. In the hundreds of meter wide training field, a blurred form was moving about at high speed. As it did...Shua! Shua! Shua! Dozens of Ning's appeared out of nowhere.

"Ning." A voice rang out.

Ning immediately came to a halt.

"Mother." Ning immediately went over to welcome her.

Yuchi Snow slowly walked over, filled with joy as she stared at her son. After suffering from Serpentwing's attack, during the day, the Ji clan had prepared a series of cremations and memorial ceremonies for the deceased black armored riders and clansmen killed during the attack. At that time, Ning had secretly informed his mother that his footwork had already reached the 'one with the world' level. But of course, his mother was the only one he told!

At just ten years of age, he had reached the 'one with the world' level of footwork. Snow had been to many areas of the Grand Xia Dynasty, but she had almost never seen someone as monstrous as this.

Actually, because Ning had utilized the [Nuwa Painting] visualization technique since birth, his soul was extremely powerful. In addition, he had painstakingly trained in the [Shadewind Steps] since he was young, and thus reached the 'advanced' level two years ago. In that moment where life and death hung in the balance, he had suddenly been able to sense the world and reached the 'one with the world' level. This was nothing more than success naturally arriving when the conditions were right.

"Ning." Snow looked at her son. "Your footwork has reached the 'one with the world' level. The next step will be to have your sword techniques also become 'one with the world'. Do not slacken off."

"Yes, mother." Ning nodded.

For footwork to be at the 'one with the world' level meant for the man to become one with the world.

But for the sword to be at the 'one with the world' level meant for the man, the sword, and the world to all become one. Naturally, it was considerably more difficult.

"Mother." Ning asked. "When will Father come back?"

"Your father went to kill that Diremonster. After killing Serpentwing, he will come home, of course." Snow said.

Chapter 5 – The Father of Spring Grass

The time passed, day after day.

The days slowly grew colder, but his father still had not returned. The Ji clan of West Prefecture had long since sent a squad of black armored riders to surround Serpentwing Lake.

Within the training yard.

One sword attack after another howled and flashed through the air. Ning stood there by himself, training in the [Raindrop Sutra]. At this point, neither black armored riders nor powerful monstrous beasts... were of any use to Ning in terms of improving his swordplay. But his father, Yichuan, had yet to return. Thus, Ning could only train by himself.

“Young master.” Autumn Leaf called out softly.

“Hrm?” Ning looked at Autumn Leaf, who had a nervous, uncertain look on her face.

Frowning, Ning sheathed his Darknorth swords. “Autumn Leaf, what is it?”

“Young master...” Autumn Leaf said in a low voice. “Spring Grass’s father requests to see you, young master.”

“Who?” Ning was stunned.

“Spring Grass’s father.” Autumn Leaf’s voice grew slightly louder. “Her biological father!”

Ning was shocked. “Spring Grass has a father?”

His two personal maids had been slaves their entire lives. When they were very young, they were sold to the Ji clan’s West Prefecture.

“Where is Spring Grass?” Ning asked.

"Spring Grass didn't dare to come see you, young master." Autumn Leaf said in a low voice. "I could tell that actually, Spring Grass would rather like to see her father, but her status...makes her afraid to say it."

Ning suddenly remembered something.

Right. Strictly speaking, Spring Grass and Autumn Leaf were his maidservants, and their lives were under his control. From the day they were sold as slaves, they no longer had any contact with their parents. However, people were not like trees or grass; they had feelings.

"Go and bring Spring Grass' father here." Ning chuckled. "Since he wants to meet me, then let him meet me."

"Yes." Autumn Leaf's face was covered with joy and she immediately ran out.

Ning called towards the outside of the yard, "Spring Grass, come in." Outside the courtyard, a fur-clad female servant was standing there uncertainly. Hearing the young master's shout, she had to walk inside. But her face was filled with nervousness and uncertainty... right now, Spring Grass felt many complicated emotions. She was excited, happy, nervous, embarrassed, guilty, and restless.

"Young master." Spring Grass looked at Ning.

"Your father is here. If you want to meet him, you can." Ning laughed.

"But...but I was bought by the Ji clan." Spring Grass bit her lips.

"Hrm?" Ning frowned slightly. "Do my words no longer carry weight around here?"

"Understood, young master." Spring Grass glanced at Ning, her heart filled with gratitude. Actually, she had long ago sensed that this most brilliant talent of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture, the youngster who would one day become Prefecture Lord, didn't treat her and

Autumn Leaf like most masters treated their servants.

"He's here." Ning looked outside, and immediately saw two figures walking into the courtyard. The one in front was Autumn Leaf, while the one behind was a tall, middle-aged man wearing black beast fur. This middle-aged man had some scars on his face, and his head was lowered, seeming rather nervous.

"Young master, he's here." Autumn Leaf said respectfully.

The scarred man hurriedly knelt down, pressing his head against the ground and also his two hands down on the ground in prostration. Extremely respectful, he said, "Blacktooth pays his respects to the mighty young master."

Seeing this, Spring Grass' eyes couldn't help but turn red.

Ning glanced at Spring Grass, then said, "Please rise."

"Yes." Only now did the scarred man rise, and as he did, he saw Spring Grass standing by Ning's side. Father and daughter's gazes met, and instantly, tears began to flow down both their faces.

The scarred man quickly recovered, hurriedly wiping his tears away.

"Why have you come here to my place?" Ning asked.

The scarred man took a deep breath. "Blacktooth has come to your place, young master, because I wish to request that young master redeem my child, 'Miwa', back to me."

"Redeem?" Ning was surprised.

Redeem?

In the years since he had arrived in this world, he didn't have many people whom he had close relationships with, but Spring Grass and Autumn Leaf, in Ning's heart, were like big sisters to him.

"Father." Spring Grass couldn't help but shout out. It was generally

possible to redeem an ordinary slave by paying a certain price, but what sort of status did young master Ji have? How could her father possibly redeem her? If the young master was angered, her father might immediately lose his life.

At the same time, she fell to her knees with a thudding sound. "Young master, my father doesn't understand anything. I beg you, young master, to pardon my father for his disrespect."

"Let him speak." Ning looked at the scarred man. "If you have anything to say, say it. If you can convince me, I'll agree. If you can't... hmph."

The scarred man's heart shook.

He understood exactly how much power and authority this young man in front of him had. If this young man wanted his life, it would be simplicity itself to take it. But since he had chosen to come...he had made mental preparations!

"Mighty young master." The scarred man said respectfully, "Blacktooth will tell you everything in my heart."

Ning only looked at him.

"I, Blacktooth, was once the son of a tribal chief." The scarred man said slowly. "Within a mountain forest, the Blacktooth Tribe lived a peaceful life. We raised animals inside, and I led the mighty warriors of the tribe to pursue and kill monstrous beasts across the nearby land...and one day, we discovered in a secluded valley a large amount of naturally grown millet rice."

"The entire tribe was extremely excited and overjoyed with this discovery. With this supply of millet, the lives of our tribe would be much improved, and we would be able to have more tribesmen. However, this news was quickly discovered by another powerful tribe, the Blood Mosquito Tribe. One morning at dawn, when the sky was just beginning to brighten and many tribesmen were still

asleep..." The scarred man's eyes revealed a hint of bitterness and pain. "They ambushed our clan, slaughtering many of my tribesmen. Our power was far inferior to the Blood Mosquito Tribe to begin with, and we were ambushed. The few of us who were lucky enough to survive had to flee."

"I fled with Miwa, encountering countless perils and dangers on the way before finally fleeing to the West Prefecture City." The scarred man's body was trembling slightly. "But my dearly beloved daughter and my tribal brothers had all died. I had to seek revenge, even if I died doing so. But Miwa was innocent and blameless. I hoped she would continue to live...so I sold her to the Ji clan. In the Ji clan, she would at least have a stable life."

Spring Grass was shaking as well, her tears pouring down. "Father, Father..."

She could never forget...

Forget those days of flight. Although she was still young, she would never forget the sight of her loved ones all dying, one after the other, and all her friends of the same age dying as well. Never forget her father desperately fighting to survive one terrible danger after another as they battled their way to the West Prefecture City. At that time, her father had only told her, "Miwa, Father needs to go do what must be done. Miwa, you need to continue to live a good life."

"Father, don't leave Miwa, Father, Father!" The young Spring Grass had cried bitterly.

The still-young Blacktooth had ground his teeth and then left.

He had embarked on the road to revenge!

"I hated..." The scarred man's body was shaking. "I wanted to get revenge. Although I was a Ninefang Warrior, to the Blood Mosquito Tribe, I was nothing at all. After I killed four of my enemies, a red-furred Diremonster suddenly ambushed the Blood Mosquito Tribe.

That bastard who had led the squad to destroy my homeland was devoured by that Diremonster in one gulp, and the Blood Mosquito Tribe was destroyed. The few lucky survivors of the Blood Mosquito Tribe all joined other tribes."

"I had no enemies left."

"I, who had nothing at all, did not have any way to redeem Miwa, so I became a travelling merchant." The scarred man said. "After one life-and-death experience after another, I managed to find some of the scattered survivors of my tribe, and my merchant caravan became more and more powerful. I gained wealth, and thus alongside the scattered survivors, I founded a tribe...my own Blacktooth Tribe! And I, I became the new 'Blacktooth'."

"While becoming a travelling merchant," the scarred man looked at Ning, "I had the chance to chat with a servant of the Ji clan, and learned that Miwa had become the maidservant of you, young master Ji."

"After re-establishing the Blacktooth Tribe, I had done all that I had to do. I had done right by my father, and by the past generations of Blacktooths." The scarred man looked at Ning. "Therefore, I have come. I have come to see my child, Miwa, whom I have seen in my dreams for these ten years. Even if I had to die, I would see Miwa."

"My Miwa, my child...I want to be with her. She is the last kin who Blacktooth has." The scarred man's face was covered in tears.

Spring Grass's face had been covered in tears long ago, and she was bawling loudly.

"Father." Spring Grass ran over, embracing her agonized father.

"Miwa." The scarred man held his daughter as well. He had been waiting for this day for so long.

Autumn Leaf, standing to one side, couldn't help but cry as well.

As for Ning, he sighed as he listened.

The tribesmen had to fight against the heavens, the earth, and the monsters. Spring Grass' father, 'Blacktooth', was the epitome of this.

"Spring Grass." Ning spoke out. "Do you wish to be together with your father?"

Spring Grass bit her lips, unable to control the tears in her eyes. She fell to her knees. "Young master, please forgive Spring Grass! I truly do wish to be with my father, I truly do!"

"Mighty young master." The scarred man immediately fell to his knees as well.

Ning looked at the two of them, father and daughter. The long time they had spent together had resulted in him loving Spring Grass and Autumn Leaf like a younger brother loving a pair of older sisters. He didn't want Spring Grass to leave him, but he wanted Spring Grass to be mentally anguished even less. "Spring Grass, from today onwards, your liberty is restored to you. You can go with your father."

"Ah!" Spring Grass and Blacktooth were both stunned.

Just like that, he had agreed?

The two of them, father and daughter, could be together again?

"Thank you, mighty young master. Blacktooth will forever remember your great benevolence, young master." Blacktooth, on his knees, thanked him again and again.

....

Under Ning's instructions, Spring Grass had her liberty restored to her. As she left alongside her father, Spring Grass had called out to him, "Young master, Spring Grass will forever remember your kindness. Spring Grass will constantly pray for you to be blessed, young master, within the Blacktooth tribe. If in the future, young

master, you ever pass by the Blacktooth Tribe, I hope you will be able to come pay a visit to Spring Grass."

"Definitely." Ning agreed.

"We definitely will go." Autumn Leaf was crying as well. She and Spring Grass truly were like sisters.

The days continued to grow colder.

Ning's mentality was changing as well.

Spring Grass' departure, her father's experiences, Serpentwing's attack, his father's departure to kill the Diremonster, his inability to find an opponent to train his swordplay with within the Ji clan...all of these events caused Ning's mentality to change.

He had the feeling that perhaps the West Prefecture City was too small of a place.

He wanted to go outside, wanted to see the wider world! He wanted to see how the tribes like the Blacktooth Tribe lived, and what their lives were like! He wanted to be like his father and go fight one Diremonster after another...he wanted to go adventure in this area of the world...

"Ning, your father is back." On this snowy day, Snow called out to her son.

Only now did Ning see that in the skies above, his father was returning, half-kneeling on the back of that Azure Firebird.

Chapter 6 – Ji Ning and Serpentwing

The hall was very silent, with the thick candles flickering and casting their light everywhere.

Ji Ning's head was lowered as he devoured the food in front of him, quickly gulping down all of the meat and wine on the table. Today, they were celebrating his father's return, so he actually had the rare chance to drink some wine.

"Father." Ning spoke out.

"Mm." Ji Yichuan frowned as he looked at his son.

Ning could sense that his father wasn't in a very good mood, because this attempt to kill Serpentwing had resulted in failure. To kill a late-stage water-type Xiantian level Diremonster which was hiding in the depths of a lake was simply too difficult. If the Ji clan of the West Prefecture truly wanted to directly slaughter Serpentwing, they could if they paid a large price for it, but clearly, the Ji clan of the West Prefecture wasn't willing to pay that price. For the sake of their pride and honor, the Ji clan of the West Prefecture had already wiped out the other creatures in Serpentwing Lake, then stationed soldiers all around Serpentwing Lake, as well as numerous Xiantian lifeforms, forcing Serpentwing to be afraid to leave Serpentwing Lake. This would be a long battle. Once Serpentwing became the slightest bit incautious, the Ji clan of the West Prefecture's Xiantian lifeforms would immediately slaughter him.

"I want to go out and adventure." Ning spoke.

"Adventure?" Yichuan frowned.

Yuchi Snow said hurriedly, "Ning, you were just ambushed by Serpentwing. You should know how terrifying Diremonsters are. Outside the Western Prefecture...there are many Diremonsters lying in wait in the high mountains and the deep lakes. To go adventuring outside...you are still too young. Wait a few more years."

"In the West Prefecture, I no longer have anyone whom I can train myself against." Ning shook his head.

Yichuan snapped coldly, "How old are you? Wait until you are at least sixteen before going out and adventuring."

"But Father!" Ning said urgently, "I've been in the Western Prefecture since I was a child. I've always stayed in this small little area of the Western Prefecture. I want to see the countless tribes in the greater world. I want to be like Father, to go out and adventure, to experience danger, to go fight with those Diremonsters and kill them."

"Diremonsters? Just based on your little bit of power..." Yichuan shook his head.

"What's the problem with my strength?" Ning said hurriedly. "Even under Serpentwing's full strength attacks, I was still able to survive. What's the problem with my strength?"

Yichuan was startled, and seemed to have suddenly thought of something. "Right. I haven't had the chance to ask you. How did you survive Serpentwing's attack?"

The nearby Snow laughed. "Yichuan, you've been dealing with Serpentwing this entire time and hadn't had the chance to come back, so we haven't had the chance to tell you. Our son, in that moment of life-and-death when being attacked by Serpentwing, has reached the 'one with the world' level of footwork. Relying on his 'one with the world' level of footwork, he was able to escape Serpentwing's attacks.

"One with the world?" Yichuan stared at Ning in astonishment.

At merely ten years old, he had reached the level of 'one with the world' in footwork?

"Receive three sword blows from me." With a sudden flip of his hands, Yichuan made three hazy sword-shadows suddenly appear

and surround Ning, attacking as fast as lightning.

Ning had been kneeling down at the dinner table. Now, he suddenly dodged aside gracefully, moving past those three hazy sword-shadows as gracefully as the wind.

"What do you think?" Ning said proudly.

"You really have reached it." Yichuan stared at his son in amazement. "One with the world. Your footwork has reached the 'one with the world' level. Then your swordplay...isn't too off from reaching the 'one with the world' level as well."

Yichuan looked at his son, his heart swelling with excitement as he quickly pondered. His son, Ning, had such a high level of talent. In the area around Swallow Mountain, he was definitely an extremely rare, monster of a talent. Such incredible talent couldn't be treated as a normal person was! Given Ning's rapid rate of improvement, there truly was nothing left in West Prefecture City which would prove useful for him in training.

"If you want to go out and adventure, that isn't completely out of the question." Yichuan looked at his son. "But you need to accomplish a requirement of mine."

"Yichuan!" Snow was a bit frantic, but Yichuan stretched his hand out, stopping her.

"Father, speak." Ning was full of excitement.

Yichuan nodded. "The Ceremony of the Golden Sword is hosted once every four years. It is a ceremony which all youths under the age of sixteen will participate in. I want you to seize the golden sword during this year's Ceremony of the Golden Sword! As long as you are able to seize the golden sword, I will permit you to go out adventuring."

"Golden sword?" Ning's eyes lit up.

He had known long ago about the agreement that if he could seize the golden sword, he would become the next Prefecture Lord. And during these recent years of training...his father had also spoken to him about this matter of 'seizing the golden sword to become the Prefecture Lord'.

"Seizing the golden sword is very easy." Ning looked at Yichuan suspiciously. "Father, I only need to use perhaps a tenth of my full strength to seize the golden sword. This isn't much of a test for me. Can it be that Father, you truly care so much about the Prefecture Lord position?"

His father's heart was totally set on the Immortal Path.

Ning naturally also had the same desire to step on the Immortal Path.

"Prefecture Lord position?" Yichuan shook his head. "You are the son of Ji Yichuan, my greatest pride. I trust that you will be able to go even farther than me...the position of Prefecture Lord of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture will only be a constraint on you. You will definitely spread your wings and fly higher."

Ning was confused. "Then Father, why do you wish me to go seize the golden sword?"

"First, to let Ji Lee know that he can stop dreaming." Yichuan said. "The second reason, you will discover after you seize the golden sword. So long as you can seize the golden sword, I will permit you to go out and adventure. But if you are unable to seize it, then be a good child and stay in the Western Prefecture City."

"Alright." Ning grinned widely.

The nearby Snow, on the other hand, was frantic.

"Enough, you can go back and get some rest now." Yichuan said.

Ning immediately jumped up and returned to his room, overjoyed. In

the main hall, Yichuan began to explain the reason for his actions to his wife, Snow.

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The next morning. Dawn.

While Ning was eating with his parents, Snow instructed him, "After seizing the golden sword, I won't block you from going adventuring either, but you have to bring followers."

"Followers?" Ning said hurriedly. "But I'm going out to adventure. What's the point of bringing a big group of followers?"

"You only need to bring two people." Snow laughed. "The first is Autumn Leaf. She is familiar with your habits and can cater to your needs. The other servant would be Mowu. Mowu used to be a Ninefang Warrior of the black armored riders, and then he followed your father for a long time. He is extremely loyal. Although he isn't as strong as you, he has abundant experience in adventuring in the wilds.

Ning pondered for a while, then nodded. "Fine, I'll bring them. I can't bring any others though."

.....

"Young master, you are going to leave the Western Prefecture to go adventuring? And you are going to bring me along with you?"

Autumn Leaf was extremely excited. Ever since she was brought into the Ji clan of the West Prefecture, she had not had a chance to leave the city for a long, long time.

"Don't just stand there, silly. Hurry up and get all the records on the Diremonsters in the area around Swallow Mountain from the library. Also get the records on the various tribes, and the maps as well. Move them all here." Ning was feeling very intrepid as he instructed Autumn Leaf, "I need to get a good understanding and prepare a rough path of adventuring for myself."

"Yes, young master." Autumn Leaf all but flew out.

Autumn Leaf was Ning's personal maidservant, and thus ever since she was young, she had been taught extremely good Ki Refining techniques, and thus was close to the peak of the Houtian level. For someone of her status, the personal maidservant of Ji Ning, she naturally would also be taught special techniques as well, permitting her, at a critical juncture, to sacrifice her life for the sake of her master.

"Coming." Autumn Leaf came back, carrying a high stack of books. With a thudding sound, she set them down on the ground. This huge stack of books had to be several hundred pounds.

Ning hurriedly began to flip through them.

One legendary Diremonster after another...

Only now did Ning truly realize exactly how many Diremonsters lay hidden within the high mountains and the deep lakes. It was because Diremonsters were both abundant and very hard to deal with. Thus, the Diremonsters and the local hegemonies such as the Ji clan actually had an unspoken understanding. Diremonsters usually wouldn't wildly slaughter humans on a wide scale, while the Ji clan and the other hegemonies wouldn't go all out to slaughter the Diremonsters.

Both sides would stay their hands, maintaining their superficial calm.

Although some tribes would often be slaughtered and some Diremonsters would be killed...it was all within a manageable degree! There was an invisible line which neither the Ji clan and the other local hegemonies, nor the Diremonsters, wished to cross. Once that line was crossed, then a true storm of blood would occur.

"Blacktooth Tribe." Ning pointed at the map. "This is the newest map of the territory of our Ji clan of the West Prefecture, and the

Blacktooth Tribe is a newly erected, small tribe. It should be Spring Grass' father's tribe. It is right here, just a thousand kilometers away from us."

"Young master, young master, we have to go pay a visit to the Blacktooth Tribe and see Spring Grass." Autumn Leaf said hurriedly.

"Of course we'd have to go."

Ning nodded. "But we have to make an adventure of it. First we go here, then here, then here, and...here!" Ning pointed at one dangerous area after another, marked with black colors on the map.

"Those are all places where Diremonsters are hiding." Autumn Leaf cried out in shock.

"Right." Ning's eyes were shining. "I'm going to go kill some Diremonsters! Don't worry, the Diremonsters I've picked out are all early Xiantian level ones. They are much weaker than Serpentwing. I'll fight them all, one after the other...until the time comes when I break through and become a Xiantian lifeform myself. After I become a Xiantian lifeform, it will be time to go to Serpentwing Lake."

Autumn Leaf said frantically, "Young master, Serpentwing is a late Xiantian level Diremonster."

"I have confidence." Ning said.

The number one Fiendgod Body Refining method, the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens], had boundless strength. Right now, despite only being at the third stage, he could already equal an ordinary early Xiantian level Ki Refiner!

Once he broke through to the fourth stage, he would be on par with a late Xiantian level Ki Refiner.

Even if he fought Serpentwing head on, he would be on par. But in terms of enlightenment, he was far superior to Serpentwing.

"Diremonster. Serpentwing." Ning's eyes flashed with a hint of wildness. He couldn't forget the scene of how Serpentwing had suddenly attacked him. "This time, when I go out and adventure, my final goal is you. I hope you won't die before I reach you!"

The Ji clan of the West Prefecture made preparations to welcome the arrival of the quadrennial Ceremony of the Golden Sword. The promising youths which the countless tribes had been preparing were all filled with eagerness, and they registered for it, one after the other. They wanted to defeat one opponent after another at the ceremony and become dazzling, glorious personages. They wanted to let their names spread throughout the countless tribes!

"This time, after the Ceremony of the Golden Sword, I am going to go back to the tribe. I am definitely going to make it into the top eight, so that I will be able to learn the techniques for training to reach the Xiantian level. That way, in my lifetime, I'll have the chance of becoming a Xiantian lifeform!" A youngster with pitch black skin, carrying a single blade on his back and dressed in ragged beast furs, with two leather shoes on his feet that had been almost worn through.

"The name of Tigerhowl shall definitely spread throughout all of the tribes of this land!"

"I am the strongest!"

"This is my final chance to obtain a training manual for Immortal magic."

All the youths of the tribes were filled with their own desires, and they went to register for the Ceremony of the Golden Sword.

This was a holy ceremony.

A holy ceremony for countless tribal youths.

The entire area under the dominion of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture and all of the young talents living in that area were going to participate in it. They desired to become famous, to obtain a profound Ki Refining technique from this Ceremony of the Golden Sword, or some other powerful techniques. These would become the powerful, awe-inspiring abilities they would rely on in the future.

.....

"What? Ji Ning is participating in the Ceremony of the Golden Sword?" Ji Lee, who had just received this news, stared, and the scarlet viper looped in his ear also spoke. "He's only ten years old. He absolutely could wait another four years to participate in the Ceremony of the Golden Sword. Why is he participating now?"

Chapter 7 – One Against Seven?

Ji Jadewich sat in his usual spot, nursing a beastskulld goblet. "Perhaps Ji Yichuan wants to let his son have an early try. After all, even if he fails, four years later, Ji Ning can try again."

"They have two chances, but I can't fail even once." Ji Lee revealed a hint of a smile on his face. "Fortunately, back then, I took in my adoptive son, Grizzly."

Immediately, Lee said to a nearby servant, "Have Grizzly come and see me!"

"Yes, master." The barefoot female servant bowed, then quickly left.

Soon afterwards, a tall young man wearing golden furs came striding in. This youngster had a very fierce aura. His face was covered with golden fur, and his eyes also had a faint gold look to them, unlike ordinary people. At all times, he carried a pitch black straight saber on his back.

He strode in, and as he did...he seemed like a skinny, golden grizzly bear. Although he was only thirteen, he was even slightly taller than Lee.

"Father." Grizzly called out respectfully.

"Grizzly." Lee looked at his adopted son, nodding in satisfaction. "The Ceremony of the Golden Sword is held once every four years. I will arrange for you to be registered in this year's Ceremony of the Golden Sword. I only have one request: Seize the golden sword!"

"Yes." Grizzly's voice was deep and thick.

"Right." Lee nodded with satisfaction. Of the many adoptive sons he had taken in, only a very few had made him satisfied, and amongst them, Grizzly was the one he was the most satisfied with. Lee had total confidence in Grizzly's abilities to prevent Ning from seizing the

golden sword in this year's ceremony.

Lee spoke again. "This time, the one you need to be careful of is the only son of Ji Yichuan - Ji Ning! Although he hasn't experienced any real life-and-death battles yet, he has still trained in the highest class techniques of our Ji clan. Although the techniques I taught you are also top-class, compared to his, they are still slightly inferior."

Grizzly nodded.

He understood. He was, after all, just an adopted son. But Ji Ning? He was the only son of the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan, and also the heir presumptive of the position of Prefecture Lord. The difference in status between the two was simply too great. Ning could easily obtain the ultimate techniques of the Ji clan, but he, an adopted child, couldn't possibly be permitted to learn the most powerful techniques of a clan.

"In addition, Ning just reached the level of 'one with the sword' this year." Lee looked at his adoptive son. "Don't be over-confident."

"I, your son, will definitely be victorious." Grizzly growled.

The Ceremony of the Golden Sword began!

Large numbers of tribal youths were at the bottom, fighting against each other wildly. One youth after another was cast out, with the stronger ones left behind. After a full month of battles, finally, the most powerful eight youths were selected. Or, to be more precise... seven youths were selected. There was another person who was automatically registered as one of the final eight, without having to undergo any competitions. Ji Ning!

Ji Ning, the only son of the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan! The most talented youngster of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture.

According to what the Ji clan of the West Prefecture said to the

outsiders, Ji Ning was so powerful that he didn't need to enter the competition at all. He could directly be included in the top eight.

Anger?

Injust?

"Hrmph. On the last day, when he encounters the other seven experts, this Ji Ning will definitely be utterly thrashed."

"He really will stoop to nothing!"

"He brings shame to the Ji clan!"

Some of the tribal youths muttered secretly amongst themselves. Only a very, very few of the tribal youths had heard the news that Ji Ning had already reached the level of 'one with the sword'.

"Huahuahua...." The battle flag flapped loudly.

The desolate, cold wind extinguished the furious flames in the hearts of many, because today would be the final day of the Ceremony of the Golden Sword!

At the center of the wide training fields, there was an enormous dueling platform, with eight tribal youths standing below it. One of them was the beast fur clad Ning. Outside was a large number of black armored riders who surrounded the dueling platform protectively, preventing any of the tens of thousands of tribal youths and citizens of the West Prefecture City who had come to watch the battles from drawing any closer to the dueling area.

"They are here."

"The Xiantian lifeforms have come."

The tens of thousands of spectators gathered here all became very excited. The Ceremony of the Golden Sword had proceeded for so

long now, and usually, there weren't so many spectators. But today was special! Because today was the final day of the Ceremony of the Golden Sword, and the final eight competitors would, in the final contest, determine who was the most powerful and who would seize the golden sword.

On the last day of the Ceremony of the Golden Sword, many legendary Xiantian lifeforms would also come and watch!

"That person riding the long-necked monstrous beast, that's the Heavenly Firehammer."

"The one riding that white tiger is the number one archer of our Ji clan of the West Prefecture!"

"That...that's the Fire God, Ji Lee!"

"Look, Raindrop sword! Over there, the one with a big, snow-white dog next to him is the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan! The big snow-white dog next to him is a Xiantian lifeform, the 'Whitewater Hound'!"

"Prefecture Lord!"

"The Prefecture Lord, Ji Young, has appeared as well!"

"Why are there so many Xiantian lifeforms present? There's too many of them!"

"So many Xiantian lifeforms!"

.....

Utter insanity. Utter pandemonium.

The Ceremony of the Golden Sword was only held once every four years, after all. Generally speaking, only a few Xiantian lifeforms would come watch, but today, many legendary figures had come, such as the mysterious, rarely seen number one expert of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture, the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan. Or the man

as wild and as arrogant as a Fire God, Ji Lee!

The ten overseers had all come, not a single one of them missing.

This was because this wasn't just a Ceremony of the Golden Sword. More importantly...this was a test and skirmish which would determine who the next Prefecture Lord would be! As long as Ning was able to seize the golden sword, then he would be the next Prefecture Lord. Since this event involved something as important as who the next Prefecture Lord would be, almost all of the Xiantian lifeforms in the Ji clan of the West Prefecture naturally came to witness it.

"Today is the final day of the Ceremony of the Golden Sword." A cold voice rang out from a woman with long hair that gleamed with blue light who stood on the dueling platform. "Now, let the eight youths ascend the platform."

Shua! Shua! Shua! Shua! Shua! Shua! Shua!

Eight shadows leapt onto the dueling platform in succession.

Ning glanced at them and found that virtually all the seven other opponents were staring at him. Clearly, all seven of them felt disdain for him being allowed to directly be placed amongst the final eight without having to advance through the many tiers of battle like they had.

"Do you think I wanted it to be like this?" Ning pursed his lips. It had totally been the decision of Prefecture Lord Young for him to be designated as one of the eight. "However, these seven fellows really are tall. Even the shortest of them, a woman, is at least 1.7 meters, slightly taller than me...ugh, and this big, stupid fellow is probably 2.3 meters tall."

Although they were 'youths', all of them were very accomplished in their training, and most were almost sixteen. Only Ning was just ten years old. Naturally, he was the shortest of them.

"The eight of you will fight each other, one at a time. The loser will leave, and the winner will remain, until four remain. And then, you will duel until only two remain, then finally, the strongest will be chosen." The long haired woman said.

Ning and the other seven youths were listening.

Suddenly...

"Halt!" A cold voice rang out.

The spectating tribal youths and citizens of Ji clan of the West Prefecture all turned towards the sound of the voice. Even the long haired woman turned and frowned. She was a Xiantian level expert of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture, and she had only come to officiate today because it was the final day. Who was causing such a ruckus at a time like this? She turned her head and saw...that the speaker was a callous-looking man dressed in white fur.

The long haired woman trembled.

"The Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan."

"Raindrop Sword."

"The Raindrop Sword looks like a giant iceberg, just standing there. I feel my heart growing cold just looking at him." The tens of thousands of spectators had excited looks in their eyes. All of the Xiantian experts present were like Fiendgods to them, but Ji Yichuan was the most dazzling expert in these lands, a legendary figure.

Yichuan sat there and said coldly, "The final day of the Ceremony of the Golden Sword is for selecting the most powerful of the eight finalists to be the one to seize the golden sword. As I see it...let Ji Ning fight the other seven!"

"One against seven?" The long haired woman was stunned. "But... but..."

"What?!"

"One against seven? The other seven are all highly talented youngsters."

"But!"

A scene of utter shock.

Even the Prefecture Lord, Ji Young, seated next to Yichuan, was amazed. As for the old man with the viper, Ji Lee, who sat on the other side of Ji Young, he immediately laughed loudly. "Wonderful. One against seven. Ji Ning is the most talented youngster in our Ji clan of the West Prefecture. Even if he loses, this would be a form of training for him. But Yichuan...if your son loses his battle against the seven of them, then what?"

"If he loses, then he admits defeat, and has nothing to do with the golden sword!" Yichuan said calmly.

"Good." Lee nodded.

Ji Young looked at Yichuan curiously, then spoke out. "Let it be as Yichuan has said."

"Yes, Prefecture Lord." The long haired woman, seeing the situation, nodded. The two most powerful factions in the Ji clan of the West Prefecture had both agreed. Naturally, she had nothing to say about it. All she could do was inwardly sigh that the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan, was perhaps too arrogant.

"The eight of you."

The long haired woman looked at the eight youths. "Come here and select your weapons. After choosing your weapons...wait for my order. Once I give the order, it will be Ji Ning fighting against the seventh of you. If Ji Ning loses, or if the seven of you lose...then this combat will come to an end."

"Hua." With a wave of her hand, the long haired woman made a large number of weapons appear out of nowhere onto the dueling platform. There were all types of weapons. Only, none of them were sharpened!

"Choose." The long haired woman said.

Ning and the other seven youths all strode forward, quickly choosing their weapons. Ning chose a sturdy black longsword that weighed roughly fifty pounds.

The tens of thousands of spectators below were all engaged in conversation. Many of them were only now seeing the 'Raindrop Sword', Ji Yichuan, for the first time. They felt as though Yichuan was like a piece of ancient, glacial ice, so cold that their hearts trembled. "Ji Yichuan is perhaps too arrogant and exacting, and he even treats his son the same way. One against seven? Even if Ji Ning's true power is beyond that of the other seven, how can he possibly beat all seven of them at once?"

"He's truly insane."

"I hear that Ji Ning is only ten years old, but his father has already ordered him to come here and attend the Ceremony of the Golden Sword, and even wants him to fight one on seven. Poor fellow."

Many of the spectators now began to feel sympathy for Ning. After all, Ning was the smallest and shortest of the eight youths on the dueling platform, and the youngest one as well. In addition, Ning was so handsome...this slender, handsome youngster had a father who was so legendarily cold and severe. One could imagine how strictly this youngster's father usually governed him.

"Are you done choosing?" The long haired woman looked at the eight youths.

Seven of the youths were standing on one side of the dueling platform. They had their weapons ready, be it a sickle, a spear, a

straight saber, or a sword. All of them stared at Ning.

On the opposite side of the platform stood Ning, all by himself.

Ning wielded a sword in his hands, staring calmly at them.

"Since you've made your choices..." The long haired woman waved her hand, reclaiming the heap of blunt weapons that were on the side while saying, "Then you can begin."

Just as her words came out...

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! The seven figures on the other side of the platform moved over at high speed, simultaneously charging at Ning, who stood on the other side.

Chapter 8 – Ji Ning’s Sword

Seven figures attacked from seven different directions, pouncing towards Ji Ning en masse.

Although they had not previously been prepared for a ‘seven against one’ battle, all of them were the most talented youths in the vast area under the control of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture. Even if they were somewhat unhappy towards this young master of the Ji clan, they didn’t dare to be the slightest bit contemptuous. As though by prior agreement, they all chosen to attack at full force!

Ning stood there, not moving at all, waiting for the seven blurs to reach him. And when they did, he moved!

Hu....

As those weapons all flashed towards him, Ning moved like a gust of wind, demonstrating extreme accuracy and precision in terms of control, positioning, speed, and power...easily dodging and moving through the combined attacks of the seven talented youths.

“What!”

“He dodged?”

“How is that possible?”

The seven youths all halted, their eyes filled with disbelief. Just then, Ning actually hadn’t even used his weapons. Just relying on footwork alone, he was able to easily dodge past their combined attacks. This sort of terrifying footwork...demonstrated that so long as Ning was focused, the seven of them combined wouldn’t be able to even touch Ning’s clothes.

“So fast.”

“Just like a gust of wind.”

"He lives up to being the son of the Raindrop Sword. Too formidable. So fast that I couldn't even clearly see him; all I saw was a blur." The tens of thousands of spectators all grew excited. In this area, all the people began to train in childhood, so they all were experienced, and yet even most of them were only able to see a blur. One could imagine how fast Ning had moved.

....

Ning halted, standing on the other side of the dueling platform.

"Seven opponents were unable to force me to use my sword. Their footwork is inferior to mine." Ning swept the seven opponents with his gaze. Just now, during that brief moment of time, he had already assessed the footwork level these seven opponents were at. "Two of them are at the 'advanced' level. One is that scimitar wielding youth, while the other is the golden-furred beast. It seems the earlier reports were in error."

Although his father was arrogant, Ning himself had sent people to collect details regarding these seven opponents. He only knew that the scimitar wielding youth had reached the advanced level of footwork. He didn't imagine that this golden-furred beast had also reached such a high level.

"But their footwork is still a bit weaker than mine." Ning revealed a small smile.

He had, after all, already reached the 'one with the world' level of footwork. Even though on this dueling platform, he would only utilize 'advanced' level footwork, his footwork was clearly more perfected. In addition, he trained in an extremely advanced [Shadewind Steps] type of footwork, allowing him to naturally seize an advantage.

"Tie him down."

"Don't give him the chance to utilize his footwork."

"All together."

The seven youths once more charged forth.

But Ning slowly walked towards them.

In an instant, the seven youths and Ning once again collided. Swords and sabers flashed in the air, but Ning still moved as though he was taking a casual stroll. The longsword in his hands became like a whip, with all of his force being transmitted to the tip of the sword as he then viciously struck out. In order to reduce the amount of casualties as much as possible during the Ceremony of the Golden Sword, all of the weapons were blunt, and thus were more suited to chopping, sweeping, and whipping type attacks.

Fast!

Ning's sword was so fast as to make one's heart shudder.

Ning gracefully walked out from the combined attacks of the seven, while at the same time, making seven lightning-fast whip-like attacks.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Five figures were sent flying backwards by the whip-strikes, flying over thirty meters before falling down onto the ground. All of them struggled to their feet, covered with dust. A few couldn't help but hold their chests, coughing out a hint of blood. Some had cuts on their faces, and their faces were filled with disbelief. This was because just then, they clearly had seen Ning attack with his sword, and they had tried to block it, but none of them had been able to touch Ning's sword.

They hadn't even been able to touch it! Ning had sent them flying!

"One with the sword!" The five talented youths instantly knew what sort of level this young master Ji had reached in swordplay, and understood how great the gap was between them.

Only three youths were left on the dueling platform.

Black sword in hand, Ning looked at the nearby scimitar wielding youth and the golden-furred beast. He nodded to himself. "I struck once against each of them, but these two were able to touch my sword. That scimitar wielding youth is very fast with his blade strikes, but he hasn't reached the 'advanced' level yet. That golden-furred beast...has actually reached the advanced level of 'one with the saber'."

"Young master Ji, remember...my name is Grizzly! Ji Grizzly!" The golden-furred bestial man stared at Ji Ning. "The one who is going to defeat you is me, Grizzly!"

The scimitar wielding youth's face changed slightly. "So I am not the strongest one after all in these many tribes. There are actually two who are stronger than me. Even this Grizzly has already reached the 'one with the saber' level."

He had been training painstakingly for many years in the martial pavilion.

He knew that he was born into a low status and wouldn't be able to obtain the ultimate saber techniques, and thus he gave up focusing on any complicated saber techniques, and instead focused on making his saber 'fast! His saber...had to be fast enough. The faster the better. He pursued the fastest possible attacks, combining them with his 'advanced' footwork...if he used his saber, he definitely would be able to defeat the other youths.

But now he discovered to his amazement that it wasn't just this son of the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan, who was stronger than him. The virtually unknown golden-furred fellow next to him was stronger than him as well.

"Ji Ning." The scimitar wielding youth suddenly growled. "I know you are stronger than me, but I want you to take three saber blows from me! Just take these three saber blows of mine alone...as for you, Grizzly, don't interfere."

Grizzly stood there disdainfully, a cold smile on his face. This scimitar wielding youth was far weaker than him, and what's more, Ning's footwork was simply too formidable, and there was no way to successfully do a combined attack on him anyhow. So he might as well let this scimitar wielding youth seek his own humiliation.

Ning, as though thinking about something, glanced at the scimitar wielding youth. He had the feeling that this scimitar wielding youth's words had some special belief hidden within.

"Alright." Ning nodded.

"Hua!"

The scimitar wielding youth charged forward like a blur, howling. His eyes were as vicious as that of a wolf's, and as he drew near Ning, his scimitar came out! The scimitar gleamed brilliantly, and the very first saber-blow was directed towards Ning's neck. Logically speaking, since the scimitar was blunt, this sort of slashing technique wasn't very suitable.

But clearly, this scimitar wielding youth wanted to demonstrate his strongest, ultimate attacks.

"Retreat." Ning moved like the wind, taking a step back, allowing the scimitar to howl past his body.

"Chi!"

Suddenly, with the flip of his hand, the scimitar wielding youth launched another attack, and this saber-blow was even faster, slashing towards Ning's neck from the opposite direction. With leap, Ning still managed to dodge, but he even he felt it was a bit difficult. If he continued to use 'advanced' level footwork and the opponent's scimitar moved any faster, Ning would have to use his sword.

"Swish!" The flashing blade suddenly left his hand, moving even faster, arriving close to Ning's eyes in an instant.

The third saber-blow – The flying saber!

The flying saber was spinning in the air, and borrowed the speed from those two earlier attacks, allowing this final flying saber attack to reach an even more incredible speed. Not hesitating at all, Ning attacked with his sword.

“Clang.” The scimitar and the sword intersected, and the scimitar immediately was sent flying away, landing back into the hands of the scimitar wielding youth.

The scimitar wielding youth nodded. “I lose.”

And then with a leap, he jumped down from the dueling platform. The scimitar wielding youth knew...that this Ji Ning and himself simply weren't on the same level at all. Even aside from the fact that Ji Ning trained in the ultimate sword techniques of the Ji clan, the simple fact that he had reached the 'one with the sword' level made it impossible for the youth to do anything to Ji Ning. He was already very satisfied with being given the chance to show off his most powerful attacks on this dueling platform.

“Recruit that scimitar wielding youth into the Ji clan!” The distant, spectating Ji Young said to one of his personal servants standing behind him. “He has the potential to reach the Xiantian level.”

Yes, master.”

....

The dueling platform only had Ning and Grizzly left.

Grizzly's eyes flashed with golden light, staring from afar at Ning, while at the same time, his entire body began to glow with a faint gold light as well, and a powerful aura began to emit from him. This caused the distant Ning's eyes to narrow. “This Grizzly is also a Fiendgod Body Refiner? It seems he's reached quite a high level as well.”

"Ji Ning." Grizzly growled. "I admit that your footwork is superior to mine! But today, we must determine who the strongest person is, and you won't be able to acquire the golden sword just by fleeing! You must fight me head on, but unfortunately, if you fight me head out, you aren't a match for me at all. You will definitely lose!"

Black sword in hand, Ning looked calmly at his opponent.

From Grizzly's ferocious aura, Ning could predict that this Grizzly had definitely gone through life-and-death battles. With his sabercraft having reached the 'one with the saber' level, and that layer of golden life demonstrating that he had trained in a powerful type of Fiendgod Body Refining technique, if Ning's guess was correct, this Grizzly should have trained in the [Eternal Mysteries of the Yellow Earth]. After all, he had reviewed all of the nineteen books on Fiendgod Body Refining which the Ji clan's five prefectures had."

"This person called Grizzly has encountered many life-and-death battles, and is a Fiendgod Body Refiner who has reached the 'one with the saber' level. But he doesn't have any reputation at all." Ning secretly mused. "He definitely wasn't born in the tribes. He should belong to the Ji clan...nine out of ten says that he is someone whom the viperous Ji Lee cultivated and intentionally kept hidden."

"Afraid?" Grizzly, saber in hand, stared like a hungry tiger at Ning. He didn't make any movement to go attack Ning of his own volition.

Ning, wielding his black sword, began to walk forward in a very calm, natural way, as though taking a stroll in his own home. If he had encountered Grizzly before suffering from Serpentwing's attack, Ning would perhaps be a bit more trouble, but in the months which had passed since suffering from Serpentwing's attack, the swordplay of Ning, who had reached the 'one with the world' level in footwork, had increased dramatically as well.

To reach the 'one with the world' level in footwork, one needed to spend time training. The same was true for reaching the 'one with the world' level in swordplay. Although Ning had yet to reach the

'one with the world' level in swordplay, Ning's swordplay was no longer what it had been mere months ago. He didn't even need to utilize the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] in order to easily defeat this Grizzly.

Ning's sword suddenly moved!

"Hu!" The sword was as graceful as the rain, descending in an instant.

Beautiful to behold.

When a killing sword technique could transform into a beautiful sight, it showed that the wielder had already reached an extremely deep level of skill.

"Break apart!" Grizzly roared as he wielded his saber, which flashed with the thickness of blood as one enormous saber-flash after another flew towards Ning. In the blink of an eye, it was though Hell had descended...those enormous flashes of saber-light were the punishing blades of hell, causing one to feel hopeless and as though they deserved to stand there and die beneath those saber flashes.

"Bloodhell Saber?" Ning's sword swept out like a gentle sprinkling of rain.

His flashing sword flowed together into one stream like rainwater which drizzled down, ensnaring Grizzly. No matter how wild and explosive Grizzly's Bloodhell Saber techniques were, that drizzling flow of water continued to ensnare it, making it lose its wild, explosive aura.

Grizzly felt as though he had suddenly become trapped in a prison of water. There was water everywhere, wildly ensnaring him. He clearly possessed boundless strength, but he wasn't able to utilize it against the water.

"Break!" Grizzly's saberplay was incomparably wild. Even though he was constantly being ensnared, he still didn't hesitate one bit, only

growing even more ferocious.

"Your saberplay is indeed strong." Ning said gently.

An opponent of this level wasn't a threat to him at all. Only, the fact that this Grizzly's saberplay was developed in life-and-death battles was a source of interest to Ning, which was why Ning was willing to exchange ten blows with him to accumulate some experience. Ning knew very well...that compared to some of the elder experts of the clan, what he lacked the most was sufficient experience.

"Hua."

The black longsword in Ning's hands suddenly thrust forward in a straight attack, and instantly, it seemed as though the entire world grew silent. The hazily glowing sword seemed to have transformed into a single drop of rain. This raindrop pierced past the saber, and as it did, the saber shattered. The raindrop then smashed against Grizzly's chest, like a raindrop falling against a stone. Pa! The faint sound of bones splintering could be heard as Grizzly was sent flying several dozen meters, smashing viciously against the floor beneath the dueling platform, causing a small crater in the earth.

Raindrop Sword – Raindrop Pierces Rocks!

"Ugh." Grizzly clutched his chest, spewing out a mouthful of fresh blood.

He lowered his head to look at his chest. The fur of the Xiantian-level beast which he wore had split open, and his chest had caved in, his bones broken. And this was with Ning using a very ordinary, blunt black longsword.

.....

The tens of thousands of spectators watching the training area all fell silent...and then, there was an earth-shaking commotion. They were all in awe. This truly was the son of the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan. No wonder the Raindrop Sword had dared to be so wildly

arrogant as to have his son fight seven others...this seemingly handsome, inexperienced young master Ji was simply too terrifying, to easily be able to dominate these seven opponents.

"Hahaha..." The Prefecture Lord, Ji Young, let out a loud, carefree laugh, incomparably happy.

He won.

His lineage had won. Ji Ning had seized the golden sword, and would become the next Prefecture Lord.

"Raindrop Pierces Rocks! The advanced level in swordplay!" Sitting next to him, Ji Lee suddenly clenched his right hand, and the stone armrest his hand was resting on was shattered and cracked.

"Second brother." Prefecture Lord Young turned to look at his second brother.

Lee looked at the Prefecture Lord, his senior brother. His face changing, he said in a low voice, "Advanced swordplay...he's only ten, but his swordplay is already 'advanced', and he has reached the level of 'expertise' in the [Raindrop Sutra], one of the five major sword techniques of the Ji clan! He is even more of a monster than his father. Senior brother, first your lineage produced Ji Yichuan, and now, your lineage produced a Ji Ning. Heaven has shown it does not favor me. I have lost, and I have nothing more to say!"

Chapter 9 – The Traceless Talisman

Prefecture Lord Ji Young spoke out, "Second brother, listen to me!"

"Big brother." Ji Lee closed his eyes, and then opened them and growled fiercely, "No need to say anything else. From today onwards, Ji Ning is the heir to the Prefecture Lord position of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture. I, Ji Lee, will definitely be prepared to come when he calls, and will be faithful and loyal as I go out and do battle on behalf of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture. I will not be the slightest bit rebellious. I thoroughly admire and submit to Ji Ning. But you...I simply do not admire and submit to you at all!"

Lee hurriedly turned and left.

"Father." Ji Jadewich, seated next to him, called out, hurriedly following after him.

Young watched quietly as Lee left, but he had a hint of a smile on his face. He knew very well that his second brother, Ji Lee, had a fierce temper. Lee was an extremely combative man. He would submit to those who were powerful, but he would never do so to one who was weak! Ever since they were young, in terms of power, he, Young, had been inferior to his second brother. Naturally, Lee had never submitted to him. But Lee had once said...if Ji Yichuan were to become Prefecture Lord, he wouldn't voice a single word of complaint.

Now that Ning had showed that he was even more of a monster than his father Yichuan, and had in such an awe-inspiring manner defeated seven opponents to seize the golden sword, Lee naturally admired and submitted to him in the same manner.

If he submitted, he submitted!

If he didn't submit, he didn't submit!

He, Ji Lee, had never admired or submitted to his big brother, Ji

Young.

.....

Sunset.

The Snowfall Palace of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture had put on a feast. The settling of the identity of the next Prefecture Lord was an event of enormous importance to the Ji clan of the West Prefecture. After Young stepped down, Ning would assume his position and also become one of the overseers. As for Young, being both a Xiantian lifeform and the previous Prefecture Lord, he would also become an overseer.

The Ji clan of the West Prefecture had in total ten major overseers. Any affairs which had a major impact on the destiny of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture were all decided together by the ten overseers. Once Ning assumed his position, the weakest of the current ten overseers would have to step down! The structure of power would completely change. One could foresee how much power would be gained by the current, principal lineage.

"Wu Sa, Wu Sa Ya!"

In the center of the palace, more than thirty barefoot and half-naked fur-clad young women were dancing.

In the area behind the two rows on each side of the palace, there were musicians playing instruments such as drums, pipes, ocarinas, and other such instruments. The sound of the musical instruments were occasionally somber while occasionally lively, reverberating throughout the palace. Within this palace, the most powerful people within the Ji clan of the West Prefecture were currently clustered together, toasting each other and laughing loudly.

Ning, as the heir apparent to the Prefecture Lord position, had his own seat as well. In front of him, there was a table that was filled with all sorts of delicious food.

"Huahuahua..." A fur-clad young lady was standing to the side, holding a large urn of wine. Seeing that Ning's beastskull cup was empty, she hurriedly filled it. The urn of wine weighed dozens of pounds, but the young fur-clad lady didn't spill a single drop of wine as she poured.

"It truly has its own unique charm." Watching, Ji Ning shook his head dizzily.

There was more than one person seated next to Ning.

Ji Yichuan was naturally seated on his knees in the middle of the table, with Yuchi Snow by his side, while a large, snow-white dog was on his other side. It was the Godbeast, 'Whitewater Hound'.

The people qualified to have their own individual seats here in the Snowfall Palace were all people of extremely high status in the Ji clan of the West Prefecture. Even Ning's mother, Snow, had to be brought in her capacity as the wife of Yichuan, as she herself wouldn't have otherwise been qualified to have her own seat.

.....

All of the Xiantian lifeforms had brought either their family or the spirit-beasts they had tamed.

Soon, it was nightfall, and the musicians and dancers all depart, and even the female servants and attendants were dismissed as well. It was the time to talk about some major affairs. If they were talking about extremely important, secret matters, even spirit-beasts and family members would have to leave.

"Everyone." Prefecture Lord Young laughed. "Today, the Ceremony of the Golden Sword was concluded. Ning, at the age of ten, defeated seven combatants by himself and seized the golden sword.

Naturally, he has become the next heir to the position of Prefecture Lord. However, Ning is still young...it's best to have him wait a while longer and gain more experience before taking the Prefecture Lord

position. As I see it, let's wait until he is twenty. What do you think, everyone?"

"Agreed."

"Agreed."

"Ning's talent is no lower than Yichuan's. He is very suitable for being selected as the next Prefecture Lord." Another overseer nodded. Not even a single objection was raised, including from those on Ji Lee's side.

Yichuan, seated off to the side, revealed a rare smile. "Prefecture Lord."

"Yichuan, what is it?" Young looked towards him.

"I wish to ask for an item for my son." Yichuan said.

Young was puzzled. "What item?"

"The Traceless Talisman!" Yichuan said solemnly. As soon as his words came out, the entire hall fell silent. Many of the Xiantian-level people stared at each other in surprise.

"The Traceless Talisman?" Young frowned as he looked at Ning, then asked, "Ning, you want the Traceless Talisman?"

Sitting there holding his wine-filled beastskull goblet, Ning was startled. Glancing at his father, he nodded. "Right."

Yichuan said, "Ning is the next Prefecture Lord. He should be able to request this Traceless Talisman, right?"

"Right." Young nodded, and then took a deep breath. With a flip of his hand, a strange jade talisman, glittering with jade light, appeared in his palm. This jade talisman was covered with complicated diagrams and illegible words, and it emanated strange, faint waves of energy which caused the area around it to seemingly distort. With

a toss, Young tossed the item directly to Yichuan. "Yichuan, this Traceless Talisman is one of the guardian treasures of our Ji clan of the West Prefecture. It must not be used carelessly."

Yichuan nodded. "I understand."

Late night. On the road back from Snowfall Palace, Ning and his parents, as well as the Whitewater Hound, were walking together.

"Father. Mother." Ning said, puzzled. "What is the Traceless Talisman. What do you want it for, Father?"

Snow laughed as she looked at her son. "This is the reason why your father said he would only permit you to leave if you participated in the Ceremony of the Golden Sword and seized the golden sword. Because only after seizing the golden sword and settling the question of your position as heir to the Prefecture Lord position would you be able to acquire one of the guardian treasures, the Traceless Talisman."

Yichuan said with a cold face, "The Traceless Talisman is an extremely valuable talisman. Three hundred years ago, one of the ancestors of our Ji clan of the West Prefecture, thanks to good luck, managed to acquire it. Back then, he acquired three of them, but he used up two of them...and now only this last one is remaining, and it has become the guardian treasure of our prefecture."

"What use does it have?" Ning asked.

Yichuan laughed. "As long as you utilize the 'Traceless Talisman', you can instantly travel to any place within ten thousand kilometers."

"What?!" Ning was shocked. Instantly travel to any location within ten thousand kilometers?

"A talisman like this is something you can't even purchase if you wanted to, and our ancestor was only able to acquire it through

luck." Yichuan sighed. "To our Ji clan, obtaining a treasure of this level...is our absolute good fortune. You are the next Prefecture Lord, and thus I used that to acquire this 'Traceless Talisman' without anyone being able to object."

After speaking, with a flip of his hand, Yichuan withdrew a jade shortsword that was gleaming with a bloody light, handing it to Ning. "This jade sword was only completed after being immersed in my blood for a long time. No matter how distant you are, I will be able to sense the location of this jade sword. This time, when you go out adventuring, keep it within you at all times. Remember, as soon as you meet any danger, immediately break this jade sword. When you break the jade sword, I will immediately know, and I will immediately use the 'Traceless Talisman' to instantly teleport to you and save your life."

"Ah!" Ning instantly understood the reason why his father needed this Traceless Talisman.

Yichuan barked at him, "On this adventuring trip, you are not permitted to go too far from the West Prefecture City. This Traceless Talisman has a maximum range of only ten thousand kilometers. Through sensing the location of the jade sword, I'll know how far away you are. If I sense that you have moved more than ten thousand kilometers away from the West Prefecture City, I will immediately head towards you, capture you, bring you back, and imprison you in the underground prison for three years!"

Ning rubbed his eyes. Imprisoned for three years in the underground prison? The forever dark underground prison, where the sunlight never shone, was the place where felons and those who were to be executed were held by the Ji clan of the West Prefecture.

"Your son will definitely remember." Ning hurriedly said.

Ten thousand kilometers?

More than enough. After all, the area which the Ji clan of the West

Prefecture controlled was only a few thousand kilometers. If he kept heading west, he would enter the territory of one of the other local hegemons.

"Ning, son." Snow asked with concern. "When do you plan to head out and go adventuring?"

"I'll make some quick preparations first." Ning nodded. "Three days from now."

Three days passed in the blink of an eye.

Dawn. The sky was barely lit. Within Ning's room.

"Ning, son, take these with you." With a wave of Snow's hand, atop Ning's bed, two large sets of beast fur clothing as well as some other miscellaneous items appeared out of nowhere.

"Mother." Ning couldn't help but say. "I've already prepared everything. Clothing, food, tools."

Yichuan snapped coldly, "If we tell you to take it, then take it. Your mother personally stitched every single one of these items with her own hands."

Ning's heart shook. He couldn't help but glance at his mother. Yuchi Snow's gaze remained on her son, and Ning could clearly sense the boundless, infinite love within his mother's gaze...ever since he was young, his mother had taken care of him in every way possible. It was like he was everything to her. For him to go adventuring, his mother most likely was truly frightened for him.

As the saying goes, 'When the son travels far, his mother worries at home.' What's more, this time he was going out to adventure.

"Father." Ning had a serious thought. He hurriedly asked, "This time, when I go out, will Ji Lee secretly..."

"He will not." Yichuan said coldly. "The reason why our Ji clan has been able to remain in existence in this part of the world for so long is because of our internal unity. We absolute forbid infighting. Anyone who violates this would suffer the pursuit and slaughter of all five prefectures of the Ji clan! In addition, I understand Lee's personality very well. He just doesn't want to submit to Prefecture Lord Young, but in his heart, he still holds the matters of the Ji clan in the highest regard. In addition, his arrogance is bred into his bones. He disdains doing such things."

Ning nodded as though he had understood something.

"Don't worry about Ji Lee." Yichuan barked. "What you need to worry more about are those Diremonsters. Diremonsters all possess different innate powers and also have different tactics. Even the Xiantian level experts of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture will often die, much less you, who have not even reached the Xiantian level!"

"Don't say such things." Snow said hurriedly. "Our son is about to go out adventuring. Say something more pleasant. Ning, son, Mother has one more thing to give you." As she spoke, a golden book appeared in her hands. The pages seemed made from gold leaf, and on top of the book there were four ancient-looking words: [Wind Wing Evasion Technique].

"This is a set of footwork techniques, and this is also the most precious Immortal training manual which Mother has. Wait until you become a Xiantian lifeform before reading it." Snow instructed. "Also, you are not permitted to teach it to any other member of the Ji clan."

"Yes." Ning nodded.

The [Shadewind Steps] which his mother had taught him was something which only his mother knew! This was because even the Ji clan didn't possess that footwork technique, so his mother had instructed him...that he was forbidden from teaching the [Shadewind Steps] to the other members of the Ji clan. This [Windwing Evasion] technique was also possessed by his mother

alone, and thus she was forbidding him from teaching it to other members of the Ji clan.

“Alright. You can head out now.” Yichuan spoke. “If you are going to leave, then leave. Be straightforward about it.”

“Father. Mother. I’m leaving now.” Ning looked at his parents.

And then, with a turn of his head, he left. Outside, Mowu and his female maidservant, Autumn Leaf, were waiting for him.

Chapter 10 – Eastmount Marsh

In the mountain forest outside the West Prefecture City.

Ji Ning, Mowu, and his maidservant Autumn Leaf were each seated on a black ferobeast. This beast was shaped like a leopard, and its body was covered with faint leopard-type patterns. It had a single horn on its head. This was an extremely ferocious type of beast. It could clamber up mountains like flat land, and was extremely fast. It was an excellent mount, but of course, it was a bit inferior to a tamed monstrous beast.

Given Ning's status, he was being quite low-key in riding this sort of mount.

"West Prefecture City." Ning turned and looked back, staring at the distant, enormous city. He had lived there ever since he was young.

"Let's go!" Ning shouted.

With a kick to the waist of the mounted beast, the mounted beast immediately leapt forward at a gallop, while Autumn Leaf and Mowu hurriedly rode their own black ferobeasts behind.

Winter left. Spring came.

On a grassy area within a mountain village, there were dozens of fur-clad men moving forward happily, half of them carrying burdens on shoulder poles.

"Uncle Dala!" A clearly inexperienced, spear-wielding youngster called out excitedly, "Before this, you never let us visit Eastmount Marsh, and you said that Eastmount Marsh was extremely dangerous. But this time...we encountered no danger at all, and we managed to catch so many fish. It will be enough for our tribe to eat for a long time."

A heroic, bear-like figure next to him laughed, "Ah Yi, you brought us good luck. This time to Eastmount Marsh, not a single tribesman died. This is very rare. However, don't underestimate Eastmount Marsh. Eastmount Marsh is one of the places in this area with the most Diremonsters within an area of ten thousand square kilometers. But of course, the fish in Eastmount Marsh are boundless in number as well."

"Ah Yi, this is the first time you've gone fishing with us. After a few more trips, you'll know how dangerous it is. When we go back, you need to exercise more and refine your ki. Only when you are strong will you be able to live a longer life." A one-armed man next to them laughed.

"Ah Yi isn't a child anymore. This time, when we go back, we need to find a woman for Ah Yi. Let's get some good furs and go to one of the neighboring tribes to exchange them for a fertile woman with big buttocks."

"Get a few more women, so they can birth a few more childrens."

The older men were all teasing this youth.

Just at this time, from the brambles and bushes nearby, a monstrous beast with black fur was lying in wait. Its fur was extremely smooth, and the contours of its body were sleek and soft. It seemed like a panther of some sort. A faint hint of green could be seen in its eyes, and its body was nearly seven meters long. Its furry mane was extremely tough, and it was shaped like a ring of circular spikes.

It was waiting. Waiting for an opportunity.

"Don't worry about that. I'll find one for myself." Ah Yi was a bit embarrassed, and his face was turning red. He hastily called out.

"Haha, he's shy."

The older men laughed.

Suddenly...

"Roaaaar!" A black blur suddenly pounced over, pouncing directly towards the closest tribesman, a man who was holding a carrying pole.

"Monster!" The other tribesmen hurriedly roared in anger, and the spears in their hands thrust out. They had painstakingly trained since their youth, and had been refining their internal energy for dozens of years, and now possessed great strength. "*Bang!*" The enormous black blur's claws easily swept aside the spears, knocking them to one side.

"Quick."

"Kill."

The surrounding tribesmen all roared with anger, thrusting out with their spears as well. As a small tribe, they didn't possess any profound Immortal techniques, making spear and polearm type weapons extremely popular amongst them. So long as they trained a few simple movements every day, after a few dozen years, their power would still be extraordinary.

"*Hua!*" Stepping on the polearms, the enormous black blur easily leapt up and pounced towards the center of the group of tribesmen.

These tribesmen often went to Eastmount Marsh to fish, and thus they selected a fairly safe return path, one which rarely encountered monstrous beasts. But caution was bred into their bones, and so the tribesmen with the carrying poles were all in the center, while the powerful tribal warriors with weapons at the ready were on the outer perimeter.

"A monster!" The one-armed man called out hurriedly. "Careful." As he spoke, he brandished his single blade, pouncing towards the massive black blur.

"Monster, die!" The most powerful of the tribal warriors, the bear-

like, 'Uncle Dala', also brandished his long greataxe as he threw himself towards the black blur.

"Kill!"

The nearby tribesmen were all going crazy.

All of them knew how powerful Bi'an Tigers were. Just then, six powerful warriors had surrounded and attacked this Bi'an Tiger, but it had easily stepped on their weapons and jumped into their center, causing them all to understand...that this was most likely an extremely terrifying monstrous beast that had already reached the peak of the Houtian level. Today, it was possible that several of them would die.

"Grrrrrrrrrrr." The Bi'an Tiger roared angrily. Unlike before, where it moved quickly, this time it stayed where it was, attacking wildly.

Clang!

The one-armed man was sent flying backwards by the collision, while Uncle Dala continued to chop downwards with his greataxe while roaring wildly. The Bi'an Tiger had also noticed that this greataxe wielding human was the most dangerous of the group, and so he didn't pay any attention to the other tribal warriors, using his sharp claws to smash directly against the greataxe, causing its trajectory to be altered. However, the greataxe still landed on the flank of the Bi'an Tiger, chopping out a massive wound. Only, the Bi'an Tiger's muscles around its flank tightened, and very little blood flowed out. The main problem was that the greataxe hadn't landed a deep enough blow. At the same time the Bi'an Tiger batted the greataxe aside, roaring, the Bi'an Tiger opened its massive maw and bit down towards Uncle Dala.

"Uncle Dala." The somewhat stupefied youngster, Ah Yi, was stunned and called out.

"Dala!"

"Dala!"

The surrounding tribesmen were all worried as well.

Suddenly...

"*Shua!*" Something flashed past like a glittering meteor from afar, instantly penetrating the Bi'an Tiger's skull, then flying out from the other side before penetrating into a giant tree...and then shot out from the other side of the tree as well.

"Grrr..."

Uncle Dala fell to the ground, with the massive body of the Bi'an Tiger on top of him, blood covering Uncle Dala's face.

"Uncle Dala." The youngster, Ah Yi, immediately ran over. He was at the verge of tears.

"I'm fine." That powerful tribesman pushed the Bi'an Tiger off, then stood up while rubbing his face, finding that it was covered with blood. "This isn't my blood. It is the Bi'an Tiger's blood."

The one armed man walked over and took a glance as well, first looking at the corpse of the Bi'an Tiger, and then at the nearby tree. His pupils contracted, and he whispered, "For an arrow to pierce through the rock-hard skull of the Bi'an Tiger, and then through the black arrowwood tree...that's simply terrifying. In addition, the Bi'an Tiger suffered the arrow in mid-leap. This archery skill..."

"Definitely a godly archer."

"A godly archer shot this arrow." All of the tribesmen stared at the corpse of the Bi'an Tiger, then looked afar into the general direction from which the arrow had come from and where the godly archer must be.

Hua! Hua! Hua!

Three figures drew from deep within the mountain forests. The tribesmen watched carefully...and soon, they were able to see them clearly. Three people, riding extremely handsome black ferobeasts. The black ferobeasts moved through the mountain slopes as though they were travelling on flat land, and quickly arrived before the tribesmen.

"Uh...." Seeing the three people in front of them, all the tribesmen were awestruck.

They were riding handsome black ferobeasts, and wore extremely meticulous, beautifully made beast fur clothes. The person in front was a seemingly very young and handsome young man, while by his side was an extremely beautiful girl. The men could swear to themselves...that they couldn't find such a girl as beautiful as this one in their entire tribe. Although she was dressed in warrior's clothes, it couldn't hide her beauty. As for the man on the other side of the youngster, he emitted a fierce, ferocious aura, causing the hearts of these tribesmen to quail.

"Hu ." The older man leapt down from his black ferobeast, walking over to the tall, thick black arrowwood tree, snatching out the arrow.

"Young master." The man walked next to the youngster, respectfully offering him the arrow.

Ji Ning accepted it.

Although they had prepared many arrows for this adventuring expedition, if they abandoned every arrow they shot out, they probably would run out of arrows soon. These were all extremely good arrows...they could be used multiple times.

"Honored young master." The one-armed tribesman went forward, respectfully bowing. "Thank you for acting to save us. Might I ask if there is some way in which our Metalstone Tribe can serve you, young master?"

The other tribesmen didn't dare to make a sound.

Someone who brought a maidservant and a manservant while adventuring...this clearly was no ordinary person. And in addition, he had been referred to as 'young master' earlier. Someone who was respectfully addressed as 'young master' was generally the son of a tribal chief of a major tribe with tens of thousands of tribesmen. Clearly, this youngster should belong to an extremely large tribe.

"Are you familiar with Eastmount Marsh?" Ning, riding on the black ferobeast, asked them.

The tribesmen looked at each other.

Why was this young master going to Eastmount Marsh? He definitely couldn't be going there for fishing like they had, right? It would definitely be very dangerous.

"I am." The powerful, dark-skinned Uncle Dala strode forward. "I have been fishing in Eastmount Marsh for dozens of years now, and am very familiar with this place. Young master, if you wish to go to Eastmount Marsh, I can lead the way for you."

"Excellent." Ning, mounted on the black ferobeast, laughed ,and then with a flip of his hand, tossed over a 'beasthead' of gold. "Come with me, then."

Accepting the beasthead of gold, Uncle Dala's eyes instantly lit up. This beasthead of gold, weighing exactly ten pounds, would be more than enough for his child to live off of for the rest of his life. He immediately gave it to the nearby one armed man. "Help me take it back and give it to my eldest son. If I die, then help me take care of my three little kids."

"Alright." The one armed man nodded.

"Report your name." Ning said.

"Honored young master, you can address me as Dala!" Uncle Dala

said respectfully.

"Dala, mount on her black ferobeast." Ning pointed to Autumn Leaf's mount. "Autumn Leaf, you come sit with me."

"Yes, young master."

Autumn Leaf leapt down, then immediately mounted Ning's black ferobeast, then held her arms around Ning's waist. She had served Ning since he was born, and they were as close to each other as real siblings. In addition, as Ning's personal maidservant, it was essentially determined long ago that she was Ning's woman, and thus there were no taboos between them.

Uncle Dala, holding his breath, carefully mounted the black ferobeast. He had never ridden on such a fine mount before.

"Let's go."

Ning ordered.

Hua !

Ning and the others rode the black ferobeasts, quickly disappearing into the mountain forests.

"Uncle Saber." The youngster, Ah Yi, asked frantically. "Uncle Dala is going to take them to the Eastmount Marsh. Will it be dangerous?"

The one-armed man nodded. "They aren't like us. That youngsters is definitely the son of a leader of a large tribe, and has received the finest instruction since he was young. That arrow was probably loosed by him. He has most likely come to Eastmount Marsh for a rite-of-passage adventure! He has to kill a certain number of monstrous beasts, but Eastmount Marsh is too large and too complicated an area. Just relying on a simple map isn't sufficient, so they asked for Uncle Dalat to help lead the way."

"Rites-of-passage? But that youngster isn't an adult yet." Ah Yi said.

"Some people look older than their age, others look younger." The one armed man said.

Actually, right now, Ning was just eleven years old, although he was already 1.7 meters tall, the same height he was in his past life.

"But that young master was very benevolent." The one armed man sighed. "Just then, when the Bi'an Tiger ambushed us, if that young master hadn't intervened...several of us probably would have died, and the first to die would have been your Uncle Dala! Having had his life saved, your Uncle Dala would go guide them, even if it cost him his life. In addition, the young master gave him a beasthead of gold. Ten pounds!"

"Hurry, hurry, hurry." The one armed man suddenly shouted.
"Butcher that Bi'an Tiger's corpse and take it back."

"Quick."

"Come."

One after another pulled out their knives and hatchets, quickly butchering the Bi'an Tiger's corpse, and then they continued on their return trip.

Chapter 11 – Entering the Marsh

Ning's squad, mounted on the three black ferobeasts, charged through the borders of the mountain forest.

"Look." Uncle Dala pointed in front. "Eastmount Marsh is up ahead."

"Eastmount Marsh."

Ning stared off into the distance.

An enormous, endless lake stretched far into the distance, flashing with the beautiful light of the spring sun. At one glance, one could see flying beasts diving down and snatching up fish, or some tails of enormous aquatic creatures wriggling amongst the reeds. Occasionally, a massive head would be seen. This was the world of monsters!

"Eastmount Marsh." Ning murmured. "We're finally here."

Eastmount Marsh was located between the territory of the Ji clan and the Ironwood clan. The Ironwood clan was a hegemonic power on par with the Ji clan, but it was the Ji clan's enemy!

Eastmount Marsh was over a thousand kilometers wide, and was on par in size with a 'province' in his previous life. Such an enormous lake...naturally had countless monstrous beasts here. The monstrous beasts which the Ji clan knew about numbered up to twelve!

Ever since leaving the Ji clan of the West Prefecture and adventuring, Ning had wanted to go fight with a few Xiantian level Diremonsters, but Diremonsters were all hidden within the deep lakes and tall mountains. How could they be so easily found? In the past, he had spent nearly an entire month searching an area without any success. Furious, Ning immediately changed their path and headed straight to Eastmount Marsh!

"There are many monsters in Eastmount Marsh, and many of them

are early Xiantian level. I refuse to believe I won't encounter a single one." Ning was like a newborn calf who didn't know the meaning of fear. However, he didn't dare to be too incautious either, because many clansmen of the Ji clan had died here in Eastmount Marsh, such as his grandfather, who had died here at Eastmount Marsh!

"Mowu. Autumn Leaf." Ning leapt off the back of his black ferobeast and instructed, "Eastmount Marsh is too risky a place, and there is danger everywhere. In addition, the black ferobeasts are of no use in the water. The two of you, take these three black ferobeasts and head to the Metalstone Tribe. Wait for me at the Metalstone Tribe!"

Mowu and Autumn Leaf glanced at each other. They could only reply respectfully, "Yes, young master."

"Dala." Ning looked at the swarthy, big man. "You and I will make a trip to this lake. Help me get used to the general areas around here, and then you can go back and rest at the Metalstone Tribe as well."

"Yes, young master." Uncle Dala said respectfully.

"Let's go."

Ning immediately headed forward, and Uncle Dala, hefting his greataxe, followed behind. Autumn Leaf and Mowu watched as their young master entered the distant Eastmount Marsh. Although they were nervous, there was nothing they could do. One of them was a maidservant, while the other was nothing more than a person assigned to teach the young master his abundant mountaineering experience. Their power was far inferior to Ning's.

The vast lake was filled with myriad beautiful scenes.

"Within this great lake, there are places with islands of firmer terrain and grasses as well." Uncle Dala laughed. "In fact, there are even some small villages. But of course, most of the muddy areas, if you step into them, you'll sink into the marsh...and in addition, there is of

course the immeasurably deep lake itself. Within the marsh, it is difficult to move about, and if you aren't careful, you'll sink into it."

Ning was right next to him.

"Our Metalstone Tribe has lived in a village near the marsh for centuries now, and often come here to fish. We know exactly where which roads are passable and which aren't." Uncle Dala was very confident.

Pa! Pa!

Striding through the mud, Ning followed this tribal warrior through Eastmount Marsh.

"Look." A beastskin parchment appeared out of nowhere in Ning's hands. "This is the map of Eastmount Lake. Lead me to these circled areas."

"Ah!" Uncle Dala was terrified. "These...these are all places where Diremonsters are hiding. These are the most dangerous places. We don't dare go near them."

"You don't need to go near them." Ning shook his head. "Just lead me there, and tell me from afar how to go."

Uncle Dala's forehead was covered in sweat. He nodded. "Alright. I'll lead you, young master."

Eastmount Marsh was simply too vast. It was indeed quite slow for them to move through it relying on their legs alone. In addition, this was Ning's first time coming here, and the various meandering pathways stretched for thousands of kilometers. Fortunately, the experienced Uncle Dala guided him to one hidden pathway after another, allowing them to easily navigate this marsh.

In the blink of an eye, over a month passed.

Ning had carried food and beverages within his kalestone, and in addition, they could roast the meat of some monstrous beasts. Whenever they went to sleep, they would just find a random patch of dry land or grass. Ning wasn't in a hurry to go challenge those hidden Diremonsters. First, he wanted to locate them. Afterwards, he would travel by himself and relying on his 'one with the world' level of footwork to easily walk atop the surface of the lake water. He would be able to traverse a thousand kilometers in but a single day.

"This is the last place." Uncle Dala pointed from afar at a distant place, where the luxurious growth of aquatic plants, at least three meters high, waved in the wind. "Right there, where the aquatic plants are growing, is the lair of a Greater Beast. Supposedly, this is an extremely, extremely large rhinoceros, an aquatic rhinoceros the size of a small mountain."

"Alright. Let's go back. After returning to the Metalstone Tribe, I will definitely reward you heavily." Ning said.

"Young master, you've given me enough." Uncle Dala said hastily.

This seemingly delicate youngster was actually terrifyingly powerful. During their month in Eastmount Marsh, they had been attacked by quite a few monstrous beasts, but all of them died to but a single blow of the youngster's sword! Ning didn't care about the corpses of the monstrous beasts either, but Uncle Dala's heart ached every time. This was monstrous beast flesh. If they sold it, the tribe would be in a much better situation, but he couldn't carry it all back, so all he could do was to carve out a few choice parts and take them with him.

"Hrm?" Ning and Uncle Dala both suddenly stared into the distance.

From afar, there was a squad of troops, with quite a few figures within.

Deep in the marsh, there were solid areas, muddy areas, and even hilly areas, along with a large mountain. That mountain was known

as the East Mountain, which was why this marsh was known as Eastmount Marsh.

Off in the distance, a squad of apparently several hundred soldiers could be seen clustered in on a hill. Suddenly, ten figures ran over at rapid speed towards Ning and Uncle Dala.

"What's going on?" Ning frowned.

"Quick, let's leave." Uncle Dala was so frightened that he immediately turned tail and ran.

Shua!

One of those ten men was wearing blue metal armor, and with a howl, he leapt forward at an astonishing speed, blocking off Uncle Dala's escape path.

"The two of you." The blue armored man stared at them coldly, pausing only briefly to glance at the exquisite beast fur clothes on Ning's body, before continuing disdainfully, "Come with us!"

"What do you want with us?" Uncle Dala, seeing the man's armor, immediately bowed and said respectfully.

The other nine walked over as well, all of them dressed in armor.

"Hurry up. If we tell you to follow us, then follow us. Otherwise, you die here!" These armor-clad guards all stared coldly while hefting their weapons, clearly very skilled.

Uncle Dala looked at Ning.

"Let's take a look for now." Ning was actually quite calm. These armored guards were clearly no ordinary people, but to him, they were like nothing more than wild chickens facing a ravenous dog. But why did the armored guards want them to follow? If it wasn't necessary, Ning didn't want to so casually slaughter others.

"Move."

"Hurry."

Under the watchful gazes of the ten armored guards, Ning and Uncle Dala headed towards the hill.

There was some grass on the hill, and there were currently hundreds of people there. Most of them were lying there with their hands and feet bound, while roughly a hundred armored guards were in a perimeter around them, while there was a stone seat in the center. On the stone seat, there was a bulky, muscled man, at least six and a half feet tall, wearing thick armor and with a dominating gaze.

Ning stared in surprise at the tall armored man who sat in the middle. The 'demonstone' in Ning's pocket was currently radiating heat. Clearly, it had sensed the presence of a nearby monster. At the same time, Ning could vaguely feel that the massive armored man escorted by the many guards had an extraordinary aura.

"There's a Diremonster." Ning hurriedly inspecting everyone carefully.

Only humans were nearby. A monster which could take human form was, without question, a Diremonster!

Ning had brought many objects with him on this journey, and a demonstone was one of them. Demonstones...were a type of special natural rock. Once they sensed the aura of a monster, they would emanate light and heat. Some cities that were even larger than West Prefecture City would have 'Monster Revealing Mirrors' installed on the city gates, which were formed from multiple demonstones. So long as a monster drew near, the Monster Revealing Mirror would immediately radiate light.

Humans had a human aura, while monsters naturally had their own monstrous auras. This was a type of life aura.

"Dala!"

"Uncle Dala!"

Suddenly, several voices rang out.

Ning and Uncle Dala both turned their heads and saw that amongst the bound people, there were ten of them calling towards the two of them. This caused Uncle Dala to immediately have a distressed look on his face. "Black Tiger, why have you been bound here?" Those ten or so people belonged to his tribe.

"Dala, why are you here? That giant person is a Diremonster. He's going to eat us all." One of the bound tribesmen called out frantically.

"Diremonster?" Uncle Dala was shocked.

Ning stared back at that massive man in heavy armor, seated in the center of that ring of armored guards. Taking a careful glance, he saw that the giant man had a hint of blood at the corner of his lips, and he was currently smacking them in a satisfied manner. This caused Ning's heart to immediately become filled with an urge to kill. "So the Diremonster which my demonstone sensed is him! Eastmount Marsh has a total of twelve Diremonsters. I wonder which one he is."

"Shut your mouth." An armored guard walked over and kicked that bound man, kicking him wildly and repeatedly. "All of you, shut your mouths."

"You are harming your fellow humans for the sake of a Diremonster, and you want us to shut our mouths?"

"And you are the venerable Blue Guards of the Ironwood clan. You really are a disgrace to the Ironwood clan!"

"Kick away, kick as much as you like, kick us all to death."

The people being kicked shouted wildly.

"Stop it!" The massive, heavily armored man seated on the stone bench rumbled. His voice was very deep, as though coming from a bullhorn. "If you kick them to death, then I'll eat you."

The armored guard glanced at the heavily armored giant, and then unhappily stepped back.

"Aquatic Rhino King!" A bald armored guard growled, "We have already helped you capture over five hundred people. Our comrades have spread out everywhere to capture people, and have already done our part. Give our young master back to us, and our Ironwood clan will act as though this never happened. Otherwise, if the situation escalates, Aquatic Rhino King...you should know that you are unable to bear the fury of our Ironwood clan."

Watching from a distance under escort from two armored guards, Ning's eyes lit up.

Aquatic Rhino King?

There was only a single Aquatic Rhinoceros amongst the twelve Diremonsters of Eastmount Marsh. It was an early Xiantian level Diremonster!

"Early Xiantian level?" Ning's eyes were filled with a killing intent. "I've searched a long, long time for a Diremonster of this level of power. This really is a case of 'searching far and wide to no avail, but then discovering it all of a sudden'."

Chapter 12 – A Slaughter Begins

The Aquatic Rhino King, seated on his stone chair, glanced at the bald armored guard. Reaching out with his enormous hand, he grabbed a nearby bound youth, placing the youth down on his thigh. The youth, on the thigh of the Aquatic Rhino King, was like a tiny doll, without any ability to resist at all. The youth screamed in pain, "He told you to go capture people, so do so. All you need to do is capture a thousand people. Oh mighty Aquatic Rhino King, the two we just captured, plus the nineteen you ate earlier, means that I have already ordered my subordinates to capture five hundred and eighty three humans for you already."

"Don't worry." The voice of the Aquatic Rhino King was still very low and very thick. "I, the Aquatic Rhino King, will do what I promise. After you catch a thousand people, I will definitely spare you."

"Baldy!" The Aquatic Rhino King stared with his massive eyes at the bald armored guard. "Don't try to use the Ironwood clan's name to try and scare me. Here in the Eastmount Marsh, every year, how many disciples of the Ironwood clan and the Ji clan die? You came to adventure in Eastmount Marsh. If you die, you die! Even if this soft-skinned, tender-fleshed 'young master' of your Ironwood clan really has an extremely high status, if I were to kill you all, most likely it would be a long time before the Ironwood clan found out that you were all dead, and wouldn't be able to find out who the killer was!"

The Blue Guards could only grit their teeth.

The Aquatic Rhino King laughed, and with a wave of his hand, tossed the bound 'young master' of the Ironwood clan to the ground again.

"All of you, go out and capture more people. Go capture more, quickly. Go capture more of these lowly peasants." Lying on the ground, the Ironwood clan's 'young master' was roaring angrily.

"But young master." The bald armored guard said frantically, "We've

already captured virtually all of the hunters and fishers here in Eastmount Marsh. Even if there were any more here...there would only be a very few. It's going to be very hard to reach four hundred."

The young master of the Ironwood clan, lying on the ground, howled fiercely, "Then find a tribe. Any who resist, slaughter them all. Bring the rest back here. You should be able to find a few hundred people in a tribe, right?"

"Massacre a tribe?" The bald armored guard was stunned.

"What are you afraid of?" The Ironwood clan's 'young master' roared, "If you are afraid, then go to the territory of the Ji clan! Go massacre a clan in the Ji clan's territory. Kill any who resist and bring the others back."

The bald armored guard clenched his teeth. "Yes!"

If it was a case of the two major sides engaging in battle, or an order from their master in ordinary circumstances, they wouldn't hesitate at all to kill. But they were now serving a Diremonster to kill and torture other humans...this caused the valiant armored guards to feel incomparable shame.

"Haha..." The Aquatic Rhino King laughed loudly, his voice like thunder. "Good, good, good. After you round up a thousand humans, I'll definitely spare you."

"Boom!"

The Aquatic Rhino King rubbed his rumbling stomach, licking his lips. "Just ate a man. Now I'm hungry again! Who should I eat?" The Aquatic Rhino King cast his gaze towards the others, and instantly, the people who were tied up all had changed looks on their face. Many people's eyes were filled with fear.

They had personally witnessed this Diremonster eat someone alive earlier. They weren't afraid of death, but to be eaten one bite at a time was a sort of hell!

"Um?" The Aquatic Rhino King's gaze landed on the distant Ning, and his eyes lit up. "Um, that human youth's skin is so delicate and so clean. He seems very young. His flesh definitely will be delicious. Quick, someone, go bring him to me." As he spoke, he began to drool.

"Young master." Uncle Dala looked frantically towards Ning. There were ten Blue Guards next to them.

"Move it." A Blue Guard grabbed at Ning's beast fur clothes.

Ning turned his head and glanced at the Blue Guard. With a movement of his right hand, he sent his right palm chopping towards the chest of the Blue Guard. Bang...a low sound rang out, and the Blue Guard was sent flying far away into the air. His eyes were bulging and round, and his mouth was hanging wide open. His face was red. Bang! Fresh blood spewed out from his shattered organs. He fell into the watery marsh over a hundred meters away, and as he did, he kicked up a splash of water, then sank down, not moving at all. Clearly, he was dead.

"To willingly serve as the fangs and claws for a Diremonster and harm those of your own race...you deserve death!" A cold voice rang out.

Utter silence.

The five hundred plus people who were tied up on the hill, as well as the hundred plus Blue Guards, and even that seated Diremonster, the Aquatic Rhino King, all turned to look at the seemingly fragile youngster.

A single palm sent someone flying over a hundred meters?

"Wonderful!" The Aquatic Rhino King was the first to react, and he actually became excited. He naturally was very happy to witness humans killing each other, and he immediately shouted, "Aren't you going to fight him? He just killed one of your people! Quick, fight!"

"Kill!" The other Blue Guards instantly saw red, and all of them

transformed into cruel blurs as they pounced towards him. The youngster in front of them had just killed one of their comrades. When their comrade had died to that palm just now, the only thing that could be said was that they were unable to react in time. In addition, this youngster probably trained in some sort of Fiendgod Body Refining technique. He just had a bit of strength, that was all.

In a life and death battle, what mattered was the sword and saber techniques which one had refined and trained in. Even if one was much physically weaker, one's sword would still be able to pierce through an opponent's skull!

Hu! Hu! Hu! Twenty Blue Guards attacked in unison.

With a wave of his hand, Ning pushed the nearby Uncle Dala, who went flying. Dala somersaulted in a midair, then landed on the ground, completely uninjured. Uncle Dala looked frantically at the twenty Blue Guards charging towards Ning. "Young master, be careful."

"Be careful."

"Quick, run."

"Young man, quick, run!"

The bound prisoners all grew frantic as well, and they began to call out, staring at the youngster with worry. They knew how powerful these Blue Guards were...these Blue Guards were highly experienced Ninefang Warriors who were extremely skilled at group attacks. These were elite soldiers of the Ironwood clan. Only a Xiantian level lifeform would be able to survive the attack of twenty of these Blue Guards.

Faced with the attacking Blue Guards, Ning suddenly transformed into a gust of wind, the carefree wind which went where it pleased. When the Blue Guards chopped and stabbed at them with their sabers, spears, and sharp swords, Ning leisurely stepped past, easily

making his way past their combined attacks.

Hu!

Pa! Pa! Pa! Pa! Pa! Pa!

A series of palm slapping sounds in a row. Even as Ning made his way past the attacks of the twenty Blue Guards, he slapped out with his palms, each strike coming from his wrist and striking onto the faces of the Blue Guards. Each palm strike of Ning's carried ten thousand pounds of force, and sent these Blue Guards flying. No one was able to block Ning's palm.

Hu!

Ning's body came to a halt. All twenty of the Blue Guards had been knocked flying to the side, all of their heads and necks crooked and twisted, blood flowing from their mouths, noses, and ears.

All of them dead!

"What?!"

"Good heavens!"

"But...but..."

The hundreds of bound people and the Blue Guards of the Ironwood clan...even the Diremonster was shocked.

"You...you..." The young master of the Ironwood clan who was lying there bound on the floor was both furious and frantic.

"We are the Blue Guards of the Ironwood clan." The other Blue Guards had very ugly looks on their faces. They were furious, but didn't dare to make a move.

Ning said with cold calm, "To willingly serve as the claws and fangs of a Diremonster is a crime that deserves death." The Ironwood clan and the Ji clan were enemies to begin with, and these dead enemies

had even been willing to serve as the claws of a Diremonster!

Hua!

A sharp sword appeared out of nowhere into Ning's hands. His feet moved, and then sword light began to flash...in the blink of an eye, nine of the Blue Guards held their throats, gurgling a few times, before collapsing, blood flowing from the wound in their necks. In terms of footwork or swordplay, this youngster was extremely fast, causing the other Blue Guards to be terrified.

Earlier, Ning had already been terrifying without even using his sword. But now, he began to wield his sword.

"Quick, run."

"Aquatic Rhino King, save us!" The Blue Guards were completely frantic. This youngster who had appeared out of nowhere was clearly about to massacre them.

The Aquatic Rhino King just sat there, laughing loudly. "All I said was that if you seized a thousand humans, I'd spare you. I never said I'd save you from others. Kill, kill, kill." The Aquatic Rhino King wasn't worried at all. To him, a Diremonster, these humans in front of him were nothing more than humans. This was nothing more than internal warfare amongst humans.

Chi! Chi! Chi!

Blood was flying everywhere, and one Blue Guard after another fell down lifelessly. The Blue Guards all fled in every which way in terror. They were truly frightened now. Their swordplay and saberplay, against this youngster, clearly weren't enough to even withstand a single blow.

"Quick, run."

"Quick."

Hu....moving at extreme speed with the sound of the wind, multiple blurry forms of Ning appeared out of nowhere. Every single Blue Guard fell where they stood. Some had been stabbed through the heart, others had their throats cut. Blood stained the ground. The Blue Guards lay collapsed on the ground, scattered throughout the area.

Every single Blue Guard had died!

"Hrm?" The Aquatic Rhino King, previously just enjoying the show, suddenly stood up, his face changed. The last, full-strength attack which Ning had employed had pushed his speed to the utmost limit, generating dozens of blurry images. This had truly stunned the Aquatic Rhino King. Before this, he hadn't considered this youngster as a potential opponent. But now, he began to feel a bit wary.

"Too powerful."

"So strong."

"They deserved to die." The bound people all felt extremely excited. They hadn't expected this youth to be as powerful as this. Could it be that this powerful youth was so powerful...that he was going to kill this terrifying Diremonster?

Swish! Swish! Swish! Sword light flashing, the ten or so people around Ning instantly found their binds had been cut through.

"Human youth." The Aquatic Rhino King transformed into a black blur, charging towards Ning and smashing down at him with a massive fist that was covered with a thick layer of ice. "They are my food."

"Clang."

Ning struck out with his Darknorth sword, stabbing straight towards that massive fist.

BANG!!!!

It was as though a mountain had collapsed. Ning flew back a hundred meters, and the layer of ice on the fist of the Aquatic Rhino King also exploded, and even half the arm of the monster had exploded. The watching tribesmen all revealed looks of joy and expectation on their faces. Had the Diremonster's arm been destroyed?

"Excellent." The Aquatic Rhino King growled. "You are worthy of me using my real form."

The Aquatic Rhino King suddenly transformed into a huge, watery fog, and then the enormous fog of water suddenly coalesced at high speed, transforming into a hill-sized, thirty meters tall massive monster. This was an enormous Aquatic Rhinoceros. It was covered with an extremely thick blue hide, and was seventy meters long. It truly was like a small mountain. The energy emitting from its nostrils caused the ground to be covered with a layer of thick ice, and the nearby tribesmen were instantly frozen into ice statues. At this time, Uncle Dala was still rapidly rescuing the other members of his clan.

"Quick, leave." The distant Ning transformed into a stream of light, travelling atop the water. In but an instant, he scurried over, and as his sword flashed, the ropes binding the dozens of men were instantly cut apart.

"Why aren't you leaving?" Ning roared angrily, and then turned to stare at the giant monster.

These people quickly grabbed the weapons lying on the ground, cut open the ropes on the people next to them, and then in the blink of an eye, the four hundred lucky survivors quickly fled.

"Fleeing? I'm going to freeze you and slowly enjoy eating you." The Aquatic Rhino King stared around him. Instantly, a cold aura began to radiate forth, and the temperature rapidly began to lower. A layer of ice and frost began to spread out, and instantly, some people were turned into ice statues. Only the fastest runners and the likes of Uncle Dala, who had fled long ago, managed to survive.

"I am the Ironwood clan's..." The young master of the Ironwood clan was still shouting fiercely, but halfway through his words, he turned into an ice statue.

In the blink of an eye, the area within thirty meters of the Aquatic Rhino King had turned into a graveyard.

Only Ning and the Aquatic Rhino King remained, staring at each other.

From off in the distance, Uncle Dala and the dozens of lucky survivors still felt the aftertaste of terror. A young man near Uncle Dala said with concern, "Uncle Dala, will that young fellow survive?"

"He will, he will." Uncle Dala said with his mouth, but in his heart, he didn't feel too confident either. Would that youngster with astonishing strength and swordplay be able to defeat the vicious, ferocious Diremonster?

"Why haven't you left yet?"

The distant Ning roared in anger.

Once the battle began, this distance of a three hundred meters, to the likes of Ning or the Aquatic Rhino King, would be nothing at all. He wouldn't be able to help save them.

"Let's go." Uncle Dala gritted his teeth, then led his tribesmen to flee. As for those of other tribes, they had fled long ago. They had been utterly frightened.

Chapter 13 – Ji Ning Battles the Diremonster

Freezing ice covered the area. Frozen corpses stood there like ice statues, whether on the ground, lying down, or standing up. There was no longer any hint of life in them. These six hundred corpses, especially those of the five hundred innocents, filled Ning's heart with an even stronger desire to kill.

"Human youth." The Aquatic Rhino's four legs seemed like massive pillars, pawing at the ground as it stared at Ning. "You have angered me. Those were meant to be my food."

The ice covered Ning, and there was even a layer of frost on his fur clothes. But Ning's clothes rippled slightly, instantly breaking apart that layer of frost. Still, a large amount of ice continued to accumulate...all Ning could do was constantly break it apart and sent it flying.

"Your swordplay and footwork are both quite impressive, but you are still only at the Houtian level. Whereas I, I am a mighty Xiantian lifeform." The Aquatic Rhino rumbled in deep throated laughter. "Since a few dozen ordinary humans fled, you'll have to be the compensatory prize. The flesh of a powerful human youth is even more attractive to me than that of a thousand ordinary humans."

"I haven't killed a Xiantian lifeform yet." Covered with frost, Ning stared at the Aquatic Rhino, his voice ice cold. "Thus, I have an unquenchable urge to kill a Xiantian lifeform! Aquatic Rhino King, as the first Xiantian lifeform to die to me, you should feel proud! I will chop off your flesh and personally sample it, and I'll also let my parents and clansmen taste your flesh!"

Hua!

Ning's left hand suddenly was also grasping a precious sword, and he was now wielding a Darknorth sword in each hand.

"Twin swords? So it seems your swordplay is just average. In this

area around Swallow Mountain, there isn't a single person who uses twin swords who had good sword techniques!" The Aquatic Rhino stared at Ning with its enormous eyes, and then casually stamped on the ground, causing the entire area to shake. And then, like a mountain, it came crashing towards him. "Die!"

Bang!

A massive hoof, so large that several men would be needed to wrap their arms around it in a circle, came crashing down from up high, stamping down towards Ning. The air itself exploded with a desolate, ear-piercing boom, and a blast of energy gouged multiple holes in the ground. Long before this hoof actually touched Ning, Ning knew how powerful it was.

"Swoosh!" Ning first drew out a sword, which dimly flashed like a faint light of water which cut at the enormous hoof in a thin line. After just barely penetrating into the hoof's skin, it was no longer able to penetrate any further. Ning immediately moved like a gust of wind and retreated.

Bang!!!

The earth shuddered, and an enormous crater many meters in size appeared, while Ning himself had already dodged more than thirty meters away.

"You won't be able to escape." The Aquatic Rhino bellowed as it charged towards Ning. Although it seemed to be clumsy, due to its massive size, it travelled a huge distance with every step. Its enormous hooves created massive crater-like hoof-prints in the ground with each pounding step, and soon, it chased Ning all the way into a mountain forest not too far from the hill.

This forest was only a few square kilometers in size.

"These trees won't be able to impede me at all." The Aquatic Rhino bellowed, charging through them. In front of the mountain-like

Aquatic Rhino, these large trees were like blades of grass being stepped on and moved through by ordinary people.

"He lives up to the reputation of being an Aquatic Rhino. His physical strength is much greater than that of an ordinary Diremonster's." Ning said to himself. "And its skin is very thick. Just relying on my internal ki energy and 'one with the world' swordplay, I'm unable to even break through its skin. It seems I'll have to rely on Fiendgod Body Refining."

Swoosh!

Ning, with a leap, suddenly was standing atop the crown of a tall, large tree. Standing on the tree's leaves, he didn't sink down at all, staring down into the matching gaze of the Aquatic Rhino.

"Huh?" The Aquatic Rhino suddenly came to a halt. He sensed that there was a change to this human youngster's aura, and in terms of the strength of that aura, it was only very slightly weaker than the Aquatic Rhino's own. "Fiendgod Body Refining?"

"Right." Ning's skin was beginning to turn red. The power of the Sun and the Moon had begun to totally fill his body, and his strength instantly rose to the maximum limits.

If he could break through and reach the Xiantian lifeform level, the divine power in his body would even be able to appear outside his body.

"Haha, you are but a Houtian lifeform. Even if you train in an Fiendgod Body Refining, you are far inferior to me." The Aquatic Rhino charged forward ferociously, smashing through trees in its wake, and the trees it smashed through all went 'pengpengpeng' as they collapsed, not able to slow it down at all.

"Hrmph."

Standing on the crown of the tree, Ning stared down coldly at the charging Aquatic Rhino, two swords in his hands.

The Aquatic Rhino was physically enormous. Only a freakishly powerful Diremonster such as Serpentwing would be able to fight against it head on. But, as an expert swordsman, Ning would not do such a thing.

Shua!

At that moment of impact, Ning used his 'one with the world' level 'Shadewind Steps' to their utmost limits, and in but a single sudden movement, he dodged the Aquatic Rhino's charge. Compared to Ning...the Aquatic Rhino was simply far less agile. While dodging from the Aquatic Rhino, the Darknorth sword in Ning's hand sliced down towards the Aquatic Rhino's flank.

The sword flashed like a thin line, translucent, gem-like line of light... as though it were a line created by a large number of waterdrops. The line came slashing through the Aquatic Rhino's flank!

[Raindrop Sutra] – Rain Line!

'Advanced' level swordplay!

Like the earlier attack he had used to block the Aquatic Rhino's stomp, this attack also was one which activated on the power of nature. However, last time, Ning had only used his internal ki energy as the foundation for the attack, while this time...the Solar and Lunar energy in Ning's body exploded. Using the Fiendgod Body Refining strength as his foundation meant that the power of this attack instantly increased by more than a hundred times!

"Huala!" The tough hide of the Aquatic Rhino, under the sharp slash of the precious weapon, 'Darknorth sword', had an enormous wound chopped straight through it. Fresh blood burst forth as though from a dam. Bang! An enormous amount of blood exploded everywhere, and shattered intestines could faintly be seen as well.

Swoosh.

Ning landed on the ground and turned.

The Aquatic Rhino, which had been charging at high speed, had come to a sudden halt while simultaneously letting out a roar of both pain and rage. His muscles and flesh were quivering, and the enormous, ripped wound in his body was rapidly beginning to shrink, but Ning's sword attack had been simply too vicious and the wound created had been too large. Even despite trying hard to suppress the blood from flowing out and to close the wound, blood still dripped out. It no longer seemed as boastful as it had been earlier.

"Aquatic Rhino King, the day of your death has come." Ning transformed into a shadow, flying at high speed towards the Aquatic Rhino.

"Howl!"

The Aquatic Rhino let out a fierce howl, and then began to charge madly...to the opposite direction. It was fleeing!

Fleeing!

"It is going to run away, just like that?" Ning was astonished.

But he quickly understood. His father had previously told him that Diremonsters were extremely crafty. Once they sensed any danger to their well-being, they would immediately flee. Clearly, this Aquatic Rhino had already discovered that its hide, which it was so proud of...could be broken through by a slice from this youngster. This meant that one of its greatest defenses was now useless!

Ning's footwork and agility far surpassed the Aquatic Rhino. After all, even the Diremonster, Serpentwing, hadn't been able to do anything to him for a period of time.

The Aquatic Rhino had always relied on its thick hide. It had thought that the youngster in front of it couldn't hurt it, while all it had to do was keep charging. If it were to even graze the youngster, the youngster would instantly be injured heavily or even die. But now, it

discovered that in but an single sword blow, the youngster had split his chest open...how could this be allowed to continue?

"Flee." The Aquatic Rhino fled wildly.

"My thick hide is hard to split open even for those other Diremonsters. How could that human youth's sword be so powerful?" The Aquatic Rhino was utterly frightened, not knowing what to do.

But...

How could he flee?

Ning, when utilizing his 'one with the world' footwork, was only slightly slower than Serpentwing. He was far superior to the Aquatic Rhino.

Shua! Shua! Shua!

Ning had already caught up to the Aquatic Rhino.

"I serve the Azure Skysnake King. You can't kill me!" The Aquatic Rhino galloped wildly while bellowing loudly, and then it also let out a desolate scream, "King! Save me!"

"King! Save me!"

The low, fierce scream travelled a very long distance.

Swoosh!

Ning's incomparably agile body suddenly charged forward, while the twin swords in his hands suddenly, simultaneously stabbed upwards. For a moment, Ning's entire body transformed into a dazzling-to-behold line of fire light, and with utter ruthlessness, he stabbed upwards at the Aquatic Rhino's neck position. With a 'Chi' sound, the Aquatic Rhino's skull was broken through. A burst of fire rose over thirty meters into the air before solidifying into a human form. It was the fur-clad Ning.

"Ugh..." The Aquatic Rhino's eyes were bulging and round. It hadn't thought that its glorious, brash life would have suddenly come to an end at the hands of this human youth. As a Xiantian lifeform Diremonster, although it possessed strong life force and wouldn't die even if stabbed in the heart, Ning had selected its true weak point! Forget about the Aquatic Rhino; even if a Xiantian-level Fiendgod Body Refiner had been stabbed in the head, he would also die.

Bang...

The massive corpse of the Aquatic Rhino collapsed to the ground, crushing many trees beneath it.

"The 'Moth Flies Into the Flame' – It really does live up to its reputation as the most powerful attack of the [Thunderflame Sword]." Ning landed gracefully from mid-air, not a single hint of blood staining his body. "By now, even the three major killing blows of the [Thunderflame Sword] have been trained to the point of the 'advanced' level."

The [Raindrop Sutra] had nine techniques in total, and Ning was already at the 'advanced' level for all of them, able to summon the power of nature.

The [Thunderflame Sword] was a bit harder, especially that last blow, 'Moth Flies Into the Flame'. Ning had never been able to truly grasp it to the point of reaching the 'advanced' level, but just then, that Diremonster, the Aquatic Rhino, had tried to charge into the nearby marsh waters. If it had made it into the marsh waters, Ning wouldn't have been able to do anything to it. In order to instantly kill such a powerful Diremonster with such strong life force...ordinary techniques wouldn't have been enough.

Ning had been frantic, and naturally thought of the the 'Moth Flies Into the Flame' attack. Utilizing nature's energy, he had pierced straight through the extremely thick skull of the Aquatic Rhino, like a moth throwing itself into a fire!

"Diremonster." Ning looked at the mountain-like corpse of the Aquatic Rhino. He couldn't help but reveal a hint of excitement in his eyes. "This is the very first Xiantian level Diremonster I have ever killed. But before dying, didn't he say something about being the subordinate of some 'Azure Skysnake King'? Hrm, best that I leave quickly and not allow anything out of the ordinary to occur."

Shua!

Ning instantly appeared next to the Aquatic Rhino's corpse. His sword flashing, he quickly chopped open the thick skin of the Aquatic Rhino. The skin of the dead Aquatic Rhino was now clearly much weaker than before...in but a few seconds, Ning retrieved from the Aquatic Rhino's corpse a black, palm-sized object that faintly emanated a fragrant scent. This was the most precious item contained within the Aquatic Rhino's body; the bezoar. It was often described as a miraculous antidote to poisons. The value of this Aquatic Rhino's bezoar alone would be enough to acquire an ordinary magic treasure.

"Time to leave." Holding the monstrous rhino's bezoar, Ning instantly moved like a gust of wind, flying away at high speed while occasionally landing and taking a few steps on the surface of the water.

Half-flying, half-walking on the waves, he fled for more than three kilometers.

Huahuahua...

Suddenly, the water in front of him suddenly began to vibrate, and an enormous whirlpool appeared.

Chapter 14 – The Godbeast, 'Azure Skysnake'

"What?" Ji Ning, staring in front of him, couldn't help but come to a halt. "Could it be that this Azure Skysnake King is really about to appear?" Not taking the time to consider anything else, Ning immediately turned and dashed across the surface of water towards a different direction, desiring to flee.

"Hua...."

An incomparably beautiful, enormous serpent head emerged from the surface of the lake, covered with jade green scales.

Staring at the enormous serpent head of the Azure Skysnake King which had emerged, Ning's face grew solemn. "I'm in trouble now. I didn't expect the Azure Skysnake King to be this fast! With my 'one with the world' footwork, I can escape the attacks of many Diremonsters. In Eastmount Marsh, there's only a few Diremonsters that pose a threat to me, but the Azure Skysnake King is one of them."

"On my very first trip to Eastmount Marsh, I encountered it!" Ning's brain quickly flashed through the information regarding the Azure Skysnake King which he had read, back in the West Prefecture.

The Azure Skysnake King was a Godbeast known as the Azure Skysnake! According to the records of the Ji clan, the last time they investigated it, it possessed the power of an early Xiantian lifeform! But although it was only an early Xiantian lifeform, due to it possessing the lineage of the Fiendgods, its power was actually comparable to that of the Diremonster, Serpentwing.

The Azure Skysnake King was famous for its agility! In other aspects, it was perhaps a bit inferior to Serpentwing, but in terms of agility, it was superior to Serpentwing! In addition, the Azure Skysnake's venom possessed extremely potent, hallucinatory qualities. If it landed a bite on its target, generally speaking, even Diremonsters

would be affected by hallucinations!

"My strongest attribute, my agility, is countered by it." Ning was worried.

In this sort of life and death battle, agility was even more important than strength and speed!

For example, the strength of the Aquatic Rhino King was far superior to that of Ning! Its defense was far superior to Ning!

But in Ning's eyes, the Aquatic Rhino King was nothing more than a stupid, clumsy idiot. He was able to effortlessly circle around the Aquatic Rhino King and then kill it. It wanted to ram into Ning, but it couldn't. But what this Azure Skysnake King was most skilled at was agility!

"Huahuahua..." From afar, the surface of the lake was beginning to slowly reveal an enormous serpentine scaled body.

The Azure Skysnake King raised its serpentine head high, staring towards Ning, its eyes filled with confusion. It let out a few low growling sounds.

"Huh?" Ning frowned, looking back at the Azure Skysnake King. What was this Snake King saying? He couldn't understand. The Azure Skysnake King was a Godbeast...and at the early Xiantian level, wasn't able to transform, nor was it able to speak in the human tongue.

Hua!

A human form suddenly rose from the water to stand next to the Azure Skysnake King. A thin, white-robed man appeared, staring towards Ning. He shouted, "My King asks you, were you the one who killed the Aquatic Rhino?"

"If I say I didn't, would you believe me?" Ning asked.

"In this area, aside from you, there are no other humans at all. Who could have done it besides you?" The tall and thin white-robed man laughed coldly. "In addition, you are able to run atop the water, showing that you have reached the 'one with the world' level!"

Suddenly, the Azure Skysnake King let out a few more growls, and the white-robed man changed the subject. "However, in the area around the Aquatic Rhino's body, there are no Xiantian energy ripple remnants. Could it be that you are not yet a Xiantian lifeform?"

"If I answer you, will you let me go?" Ning asked.

"How could that be possible?" The white robed man laughed coldly. "You killed one of the King's subordinates, the Aquatic Rhino. If we so casually let you leave, what would become of the King's prestige?"

Ning frowned and shouted back, "If that's the case, then enough chitchat. If you want to fight, then fight. If you don't want to fight, then I'm leaving."

The Azure Skysnake King stared at Ning with its enormous serpentine head, filled with questions. The little human child in front of it...it wasn't afraid of him, naturally. But the area around the Aquatic Rhino was simply too bizarre. There clearly wasn't any Xiantian energy ripples in the area, but why did the Aquatic Rhino die? Could someone who wasn't at the Xiantian level kill a Diremonster?

"Hrmph." Ning immediately began to run atop the water, transforming into a gust of wind, fleeing at high speed.

Although he had come out to adventure, he knew his own limits. If he went to engage in battle against Diremonsters that were too powerful, he was asking for death! Ning had never intended to do battle against the Azure Skysnake King...

"Hua..." The Azure Skysnake King swam across the surface of the lake, transforming into a silver tidal wave.

In an instant, an enormous serpentine head appeared in front of Ning yet again.

"He really is faster than me." Ning came to a sudden halt, his eyes blazing with wildness. "It seems this fight cannot be avoided. If that's the case, then let's fight!"

"In Eastmount Marsh, the only one faster than my King is that ancient monster, the Snow Toad! Do you know of the Ancient Snow Toad? That is the most powerful Diremonster of the entire Eastmount Marsh. It can freeze and kill you with but a single cold breath!" The white-robed man was walking atop the water, each step causing the water to ripple slightly, his movements not nearly as agile and graceful as Ning's. "It is best that you simply accept your death before my King..."

Ning frowned, then transformed into a streak of light, charging towards that tall, thin, white-robed man. "Monster, you sure are noisy. Eat a sword from me!"

Swish!

A cold light flashed towards the man. The white-robed man was so frightened that he immediately dove into the water with a splash. He served under the Azure Skysnake King, and in terms of power, he was actually a bit weaker than even the Aquatic Rhino King. How could he dare to fight with this human youth?

"Groooowl." The Azure Skysnake King suddenly let out an angry roar.

Ning turned his head to look at him, not afraid at all. Since he wasn't going to be able to flee, Ning naturally wiped the hesitation and fear away from his heart, leaving only a blazing heat. The heat of battle! Only by fighting an opponent's whose strength totally surpassed his own would the blood in his entire body truly begin to boil!

Hua...suddenly, an enormous green scaled tail emerged from the lake at high speed, sweeping towards Ning at incomparably high

speed.

"So fast!" Ning's entire body was turning faintly red. Clearly, the Solar and Lunar energies in his body had been raised to their limits. At the same time, his feet began to move in accordance with the Shadewind Steps, and he wielded his twin Darknorth swords in his hands, one of which was flashing with blue light on its edge; poison! The Darknorth swords composed of three swords and a sheath. Two of the swords were normal, but one of them had been coated by Ning with poison.

In fact, even a small part of the arrows he had brought were treated with poison! After all, while adventuring and engaging in life-and-death battles, the ultimate goal was to kill the opponent! Naturally, any means of accomplishing this would be acceptable. When battling with the likes of the Aquatic Rhino King, Ning didn't bother with poison, but this Azure Skysnake King was simply too dangerous.

With one hand, he executed 'Thin Streams Flow Forever'.

With the other hand, he executed 'Rain Line'.

Both Darknorth swords moved, instantly drawing forth the power of the natural world. Huahuahua...a visible, thin, and long stream of water was currently arcing towards the serpentine tail in an attack. This stream of water was incomparably tough, and it wildly wrapped around the tail, causing the power and speed of that tail to slow.

At the same time, drops of water had solidified into a thin line, and that thin line chopped directly towards that enormous serpentine body!

"Bang!" Ning was blasted backwards at high speed by the force of the collision, and water splashed everywhere.

"Huala!" Green, emerald-like blood came flying out of a large wound on the serpentine body, but quickly, the flow of blood slowed and the wound shrank. The blood, however, had a faint black color as well,

but moments later, it returned to an emerald color. Clearly, the poison on the Darknorth swords didn't pose much of a threat to the Azure Skysnake King, which was venomous by nature.

Swoosh!

Ning rose high into the sky, leaping off the surface of the water.

The Azure Skysnake King coiled up its enormous body, staring at the distant human youth. This human youth had actually wounded it in a single exchange.

Suddenly...

The enormous body of the Azure Skysnake King began to shrink at high speed. Previously, it had been even larger than Serpentwing, but in a few seconds, it transformed to a size of only ten meters long, and its serpentine body was now only as thick as a person's thighs. At the same time, this jade-green Azure Skysnake continued to stare at Ning, emitted a 'Hissssss' sound.

"Not good." Ning's face grew even more solemn.

The Azure Skysnake King was a Godbeast. It could increase or decrease its size, and was famous for its agility. When it shrank its size, that was when it was the most fearsome!

A violet pill suddenly appeared in Ning's hand out of nowhere, and he immediately tossed it in his mouth. This was an antivenom spiritual pill. It was one of multiple different types of antivenoms which Ning had prepared for this adventuring expedition for when he encountered Diremonsters. This one was particularly effective against hallucinatory toxins and venoms.

Ning wielded his twin blades, staring death at the Azure Skysnake King.

The Azure Skysnake King's serpentine head swayed slightly in a confident manner. It seemed like an experienced hunter, searching

for Ning's weaknesses. While swaying, it also slowly began to move closer to Ning, but Ning, striding on water, took one step back after another, maintaining the distance between them.

"Swish!"

Suddenly, the Azure Skysnake King transformed into a flash of emerald lightning!

It charged at Ning!

Ji Ning's eyes flashed with a fierce light. The Darknorth sword in his right hand suddenly transformed into a flash, chopping ray of light as his speed increased to its maximum. This was one of the three killing strokes of the [Thunderflame Sword], 'Thunderflint Flash'. This technique relied on a single word; 'Quick! It could be described as the fastest sword attack Ning was capable of, and he used it now to deal with this sudden pounce of the Azure Skysnake King!

Shua! Shua!

In but an instant, the Azure Skysnake King changed direction twelve times, transforming into a magical, illusory shadow which passed through the Darknorth sword in Ning's right hand, and even used its serpentine body, now greatly reduced in size but clearly much more powerful, to strike at the Darknorth sword.

But Ning's left hand, also wielding a Darknorth sword, transformed into circles of spinning water as he put on display the most defensively powerful stance of the [Raindrop Sutra], 'Watertight'!

"Clang!"

The serpentine head and the edge of the Darknorth sword collided, and the Azure Skysnake King couldn't help but have its trajectory slightly altered to one side.

The two of them passed each other!

"Pal!" In that instant when they moved past each other, a terrifying shadow suddenly emerged from the water, striking towards Ning. Ning, unable to block in time, was struck heavily on the chest with a 'Bang' sound...Ning couldn't help but immediately vomit out a mouthful of blood, his face turning red as he was sent flying across the surface of the lake.

Huahua...

The Azure Skysnake King swam at high speed through the waters of the lake, pouncing towards Ning's position.

"Those whip-strokes of that tail are too fast. Much faster than the tail strikes of that old monster Serpentwing." Ning, in mid-air, flipped around and gracefully landed on the surface of the lake. He couldn't help but clutch his chest. He could faintly sense that his bones were broken, but the powerful regenerative energies of the Fiendgod Body Refining method was quickly restoring them.

Kakaka...the two shattered ribs in his chest quickly were repaired.

"But his strength is quite a bit lower than Serpentwing's." Ning stared at his chest. Only his fur clothes had been ripped apart. With the added protection of the Goldstar Shirt, his body hadn't been injured too badly.

"Swish!"

The Azure Skysnake King once more shot towards him as fast as lightning.

So very fast!

"Come." Ning wildly wielded his twin swords in an effort to defend. The Azure Skysnake King moved its head as if to bite, moved its body as if to coil around him, and also used its serpentine tail to strike at him. Its entire body was a weapon, and it coiled around Ning, wildly attacking. In this sort of extremely close quarters combat, often, a single second would allow numerous blows to be exchanged.

Ning's [Raindrop Sutra] and [Thunderflame Sword] had both reached the 'advanced' stage, but he had yet to reach the 'one with the world' level of swordplay!

If his swordplay was at the 'one with the world' level, every ordinary pierce, thrust, scrape...any attack would be able to call on the natural power of the world. Only then was one's level of swordplay truly at the 'one with the world' level. Because Ning had yet to reach this level, thus in this sort of high-speed combat, some of the postures and movements of his attacks were no longer carrying the power of the world.

Upon losing the natural power of the world, the power of his swordplay decreased noticeably. This was an enormous flaw, one which Ning was relying on his twin swords to make up for, but still, in the end...if one only defended, one would be defeated!

"Chi!"

The Azure Skysnake King's serpentine head bit viciously at Ning's calf, and its sharp, venomous fangs pierced straight through the fur clothes and the Goldstar Shirt, the venom in its fangs instantly transmitting into Ning's body. A powerful, numbing, intoxicating sensation quickly spread from Ning's calf to the rest of his body, and Ning hurriedly swallowed the antivenom spiritual pill which he had been holding under his tongue.

"Die." Ning struck out with the Darknorth swords in both hands, both of them simultaneously executing the 'Moth Flies into the Flame' of the [Thunderflame Sword]. The two swords instantly seemed to have transformed into two scorching lines of fire, piercing down directly towards the head of the Azure Skysnake King which was latched onto his calf!

Chapter 15 – One With the World

The white-robed skinny man stealthily popped out of the water, staring at the distant battle between the Azure Skysnake and the human youth.

“That human youth is truly formidable.” The white-robed man couldn’t help but let out a soft sigh of amazement. “He’s actually able to force the King to shrink in size to fight him. In terms of power, even I am inferior to that human youth...it seems in the future, when I encounter human youths, I need to be more careful. Still, it looks like that human youth is about to die!”

“After he dies, I need to go have a taste of that youth’s flesh. Such a powerful human youth...I haven’t seen another like him in the three hundred years I have spent training.”

“Huh.”

“How unfortunate for him.” The white robed man shook his head as he watched.

Most of Ji Ning’s beast fur clothes had been ripped to tatters, and blood was dribbling down his chest. His hair-bindings had been shattered, and his hair was now loose and unbound. But he still wielded those two Darknorth swords with hands that were as stable as ever, and his eyes were still very bright, as though fires were burning in them!

Desire!

A desire to achieve victory. Even though he was currently at a disadvantage and was being wounded repeatedly, Ning had never even thought of giving up.

“So what if you trained in a Fiendgod Body Refining method?” The

white robed man snickered. "He's still only at the Houtian level. Injured repeatedly, then healing repeatedly. Each recovery will take up a large amount of his energy! After the energy in his body is depleted...then, utterly exhausted, he will no longer be able to fight back."

He could all but see the astonishingly talented youth collapse, and then be dismembered and eaten by the Diremonsters.

"How sad. A heroic figure who would have doubtlessly become legendary throughout this area is going to die, right here." The white robed man watched, not wanting to miss a thing.

"Huh?"

The white robed man's face changed slightly. "Why is his swordplay..."

The Azure Skysnake King was simply too strong. After having shrunk in size, the body of the Azure Skysnake King became even tougher, like an iron whip. It had also become even more agile and even fiercer! In terms of strength, defense, speed, it was superior to Ning...Ning's only advantage was that the pair of Darknorth swords he wielded in his hands.

The Azure Skysnake King's pressuring attacks had caused Ning to enter an empty mental realm where nothing existed except the next attack! He didn't have any other thoughts, other than thoughts of battle!

Kill!

Kill!

The Azure Skysnake King in front of him was like a nightmare. Its striking attacks was even faster than Ning's Thunderflint Flash! Its coiling body was even more elastic than Ning's Thin Streams Flow

Forever' attack! Its whip-like tail struck against Ning, causing him to lose his breath, but fortunately, his two Darknorth swords were able to complement each other.

If one sword couldn't take it, then the second sword would join in!

"Clang!" "Clang!" "Clang!"

At first, he was constantly being wounded.

However, because he had a Fiendgod Body and had eaten an antivenom spiritual pill, the venom of the Azure Skysnake King, despite causing a bit of numbness, didn't have any effect on his ability to perform in battle. As for bloodloss...Ning cared about that even less!

Slowly...

The Azure Skysnake King seemed to find it harder and harder to break through the defenses of the Darknorth swords. It was growing harder for him to wound Ning.

"Huahuahua..." The swords flashed everywhere, summoning the power of the world.

The Azure Skysnake King transformed into an emerald ray of light, swirling around Ning, attacking him wildly time and time again, but that perfect, mastered swordplay which carried with it the power of the world had created an utterly unbroken defense...one sword attack flashed after another, flowing like quicksilver, revealing no cracks at all, causing each of the Azure Skysnake King's attacks to be fruitless.

"Hrm?" Ning suddenly found that he was able to think again.

Earlier, the Azure Skysnake King had simply put him under too much pressure, forcing him to totally concentrate on defense and on this battle. But now, that pressure had decreased, and he could spare a little bit of time to think. And when he did, Ning discovered that

under the pressure of the Azure Skysnake King's attacks, his swordplay had become perfected, with each sword blow that he delivered having not a single flaw at all.

"My swordplay..." Ning's face slowly was covered with a smile.

"Hahahaha!!!!"

Ning suddenly laughed loudly, laughed joyfully. "I broke through, hahaha! Azure Skysnake King, thank you for helping me make this breakthrough. I've finally reached the level of becoming 'one with the world' in swordplay."

One with the world!

After having experienced these two major, bloody battles, especially with the amount of pressure which the Azure Skysnake King had placed him under, Ning had finally taken the final step and reached the level of being 'one with the world' in swordplay! Actually, Ning had already reached the end of the 'advanced' level in both sets of sword techniques he knew, and had already been very close to breaking through. All he needed was a bit of good luck.

If he had stayed in the West Prefecture City and slowly trained on his own through constant repetition, he probably would've needed a few more years to break through.

"Hisssss!" A low, growling hiss. The Azure Skysnake King had been enraged. The arrogant beast hadn't expected that the youth he was hunting would suddenly have improved.

"What's the point of being angry?" Ning ran atop the surface of the water. "I no longer fear you now!"

"Hissssssssssssssss."

Hissing with fury, the Azure Skysnake King pounced wildly towards

Ning, moving with even greater ferocity, no longer paying attention to its own defense. Previously, as the Azure Skysnake King had the advantage, it didn't pay too much attention to receiving wounds, but now, the Azure Skysnake King had decided that even at the cost of being wounded, it would still kill this arrogant, belittling human.

"Come, you liddle widdle snakey!" Ning wielded Darknorth swords in his two hands. At this moment, he felt as though being able to display his swordplay was a sort of enjoyment, something which was graceful and elegant.

He delivered one sword stroke after another, each one perfect and flawless.

Even the simplest of chops and stabs were utterly unbreakable and immaculate!

"Our fight comes to an end here for today, Azure Skysnake King. This time, thank you so very much for helping me break through." Ning laughed loudly as he began to run away.

Both of the Darknorth swords in his hands were currently executing the 'Watertight' stance of the [Raindrop Sutra]. He wasn't striving to land any blows, only to be able to defend himself, causing the Azure Skysnake King to be utterly unable to do anything to Ji Ning...and in the blink of an eye, Ning fled far away."

A long time later...

"Grrrrrrr."

The Azure Skysnake King swam back. All it could do was raise its head towards the sky and roar in dissatisfaction. Over the course of its life, it had met multiple Xiantian level humans who had reached the 'one with the world' level, but it had still beaten the snot out of those humans...but that youngster with the twin swords he had just faced used those two swords as though they were wielded by two separate people who were perfectly linked in their thoughts. Indeed,

the threat posed by those twin swords was ten times greater than normal.

No matter what sort of disadvantage Ning had been put into, and even if one of his swords had been forced out of position and no longer at the pseudo 'one with the world' level granted by his sword techniques, the other sword would still maintain the 'one with the world' level, causing his actual battle ability to be no lower than that of a single-weapon expert at the 'one with the world' level.

But now...

Ning had truly reached the 'one with the world' level, and his power had exploded. Even facing against a Xiantian Godbeast, he was still able to flee easily.

Swoosh!

He ran as fast as the wind.

"Hahahaha..." Ning was extremely delighted. He ran as he pleased atop the surface of the water, moving through Eastmount Marsh before entering the mountain forests. After running a long time, Ning leapt atop a large tree. Passing by the crown of the tree, with another leap, he sent himself floating gracefully several dozen more meters before landing by atop a cliff. With only a few more bounds, he ended up at the peak of this little mountain.

Sitting down on the mountain peak, he leisurely withdrew a bottle of fruit wine from his kalestone, then raised his head and poured it into his mouth. And then, Ning happily shouted, "Enjoyable! Today was so enjoyable."

He had battle against two Diremonsters, and had executed the Aquatic Rhino King! The other, more powerful Diremonster, the 'Azure Skysnake King', was indeed extremely powerful. Under the pressure of its attacks, Ning's swordplay had suddenly broken

through and reached the 'one with the world' level.

"One with the world!"

Ning couldn't help but feel self-satisfied. "Although the Xiantian level experts of West Prefecture City can use magic treasures, in terms of skill level, I imagine most of them are inferior to me."

"Only, I don't know what level Father is at, exactly. Even before going out and adventuring, Father had become acknowledged as the number one expert of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture, and had reached the 'one with the world' level long ago. Afterwards, he had gone adventuring for nearly ten years and met my mother...and then ever since then, he had been living peacefully at the West Prefecture City. Nobody knows how strong he has become!" Ning pondered this question. "But previously, when that Diremonster, Serpentwing, had attacked, that sword blow Father sent out from far away..."

That sword blow had truly been terrifying.

"My father's skill level should still be stronger than mine." Ning shook his head. "Enough of that. I'm not even at the Xiantian level yet."

Xiantian lifeforms possessed extraordinary power.

Even Ki Refiners at that level would be able to use all sorts of magic treasures, seals, and formations. As for Fiendgod Body Refiners...they had all sorts of incredible transformations available to them, and they would truly be able to be described as Fiendgods. After all, during the ancient Fiendgod Era, those Fiendgods were all born at the Xiantian level.

"The technique I am training in is acclaimed as the most powerful Fiendgod Body Refining technique. Not a single member of the Ji clan, in its entire history, has ever successfully reached the Xiantian level in it." Ning was worried about this. "So how should I break through, exactly?"

The [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] was simply too

difficult!

Actually, Ning's natural gifts, such as his utterly pure body, as clean as a newborn's, and the [Nuwa Painting] visualization technique, caused the power of his already mighty soul to increase every day! It was extremely beneficial to him in body training, causing his rate of improvement to be extremely rapid. If he had been training in an ordinary Fiendgod Body Refining method, he would have broken through to the Xiantian level long ago.

By contrast, in terms of Ki Refining, Ning's talent was a bit weaker.

Because he had been injured while he was in the womb, his meridian system had been damaged. At that time, when his father, Ji Yichuan, and Prefecture Lord Ji Young had investigated the quality of the meridians in his body, they had found that it was very average. The vast majority of Xiantian lifeforms relied on Ki Refining to traverse the Path of Immortals. Fiendgod Body Refining was even more difficult. None of them had expected that although Ning's Ki Refining talent was rather poor, he would have such a monstrous aptitude for Body Refining.

"The [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] has notes."

"I have to 'merge Yin and Yang, fuse fire and water'. The power of the Moon and the power of the Sun must combine into a whole, transforming into the 'Crimsonbright' divine power." Ning pondered this. "But how would one cause fire and water to fuse? How would one cause the power of the Moon and the Sun to combine into a whole?"

All Ning knew was that fire and water didn't mix! How, then, could fire and water be fused?

This was an extremely difficult step.

"I have to reach the Xiantian level!" Ning suddenly rose to his feet. Standing at the mountain peak, his eyes were filled with desire. "The

Xiantian level, in the distant Heaven Realm, is nothing more than a starting point! To the ancient Fiendgods, the Xiantian level is nothing more than the level they were at when they were first born! If I can't even break through to the Xiantian level, how can I possibly talk about being able to control my own destiny?"

Chapter 16 – The Fur Collectors

The exquisitely cut and stitched beast furs were very form fitting, causing Autumn Leaf to seem rather heroic and valiant. She stood there in the area outside the Metalstone Tribe, staring off into the distance.

Her figure had attracted the attention and the gazes of this rustic tribe's youths. Ever since Autumn Leaf had arrived at the Metalstone Tribe, there had been no question that she had become the most beautiful girl here...one youngster after another did their best to find opportunities to show off their strength and valor in front of her, but not a single one had been able to attract her interest.

"Miss Autumn Leaf is waiting for her young master, right?"

"Right. I hear that Uncle Dala, upon returning, said that her young master is extremely powerful. Over a hundred Blue Guards of the Ironwood clan were all killed by that young master in the blink of an eye!"

"Only a powerful young master like that would be worthy of someone as beautiful as Miss Autumn Leaf."

"It's a pity that he encountered a Diremonster! Most likely, that powerful young master won't be able to survive his encounter with the Diremonster. When angered, Diremonsters can cause the entire area to change. That one had immediately killed a large group of people by freezing them to death. Uncle Dala and the others were only lucky enough to survive because they fled quickly. If that young master were to die, Miss Autumn Leaf would have to find another person to marry!"

The youths of the tribe all watched from their position by the gate while speaking quietly amongst themselves.

As far as they considered, a girl like Autumn Leaf was like one of the legendary goddesses...compare to Autumn Leaf, the other girls of

their tribe were as far beneath her as the earth was beneath the heavens.

Autumn Leaf stood there, staring into the distant mountain forest.

She was waiting. Waiting for the most important man in her life.

“Autumn Leaf.” A powerfully built figure strode out from the tribe. It was the other servant, Mowu. Mowu urged her, “Go back and get some rest. Once the young master arrives, the guards at the gate of the tribe will definitely see him.”

“No.” Autumn Leaf shook her head gently.

Mowu looked at Autumn Leaf, and then he sat down as well on a nearby, chopped-through tree trunk. His forehead was furrowed in worry as well. After Uncle Dala had returned, he had found out that Ji Ning had begun battling with the ‘Aquatic Rhino King’, a Diremonster. As to what the results of that battle were, no one knew. Although in his heart, of course he still hoped that his young master would return, his rational mind was telling him...the young master probably had met with misfortune!

This was because Uncle Dala and the others had spent roughly two days on the journey back from Eastmount Marsh.

Given young master Ning's speed, if he was still alive, he probably would have made his way to the Metalstone Tribe under half a day. Logically speaking, he should have reached the Metalstone Tribe before Uncle Dala and the others had arrived! But Uncle Dala and the others had been back for more than two days, but Ning had yet to return.

“If the young master is dead...Autumn Leaf and I will most likely have to die as well.” Mowu said quietly.

If their master died, how could the servants continue to live?

Local hegemons such as the Ji clan had very strict internal regulations.

"Huh?" Mowu suddenly blinked. From afar, he faintly saw an indistinct, yet familiar figure...the young master's figure!

"Young master!" Autumn Leaf had already begun to rush over there.

"Young master?"

"Miss Autumn Leaf is running over."

"Look, there seems to be someone coming from that side. Could that be the young master which Miss Autumn Leaf has been waiting for?" The youths standing guard at the gate whispered to each other, while some of them also immediately began to run inside the tribe to inform the other tribesmen.

Autumn Leaf watched as the fur-clad, smiling young man walked over. The past two days, she had been constantly repressing her own fear, her nervousness, her wild thoughts...and now, all these various emotions caused her to suddenly begin to shed tears.

"Young master." Autumn Leaf looked at Ning. "I, I..."

"Hey, I'm back." With his astonishing eyesight Ning noticed that from afar, in the middle of the tribe, Uncle Dala and the one-armed man were currently walking in their direction. He couldn't help but laugh, "So Dala made it back already. Was he the one who told you that I was battling with the Aquatic Rhino King? Just because I didn't come back for a few days, you were frightened this badly?"

Autumn Leaf did her best to hold back further tears.

"It was just an Aquatic Rhino King. To your young master, it's barely worth mentioning." Ning winked at her, seemingly in extremely high spirits.

Autumn Leaf breathed out in astonishment, "Young master, you killed the Diremonster?"

"Yep." Ning nodded delightedly.

"Wow, a Diremonster. Young master, you killed a Diremonster." Autumn Leaf was extremely excited. "Young master, you are only eleven years old, but you killed a Diremonster. This...this..." As a personal maidservant, Autumn Leaf's life centered around Ning. As she always revolved around him, to her, Ning was like her most important family member. Naturally, Autumn Leaf was truly excited to learn that Ji Ning was now capable of killing Diremonsters."

Ji Ning hurriedly lowered his voice. "Don't spread the news."

"Right, right." Autumn Leaf nodded hurriedly.

"Come, let's go take a look at the Metalstone Tribe." Ning said. The past few days, Ning had been in the mountain forests, pondering the results of the past two day's battles. He had also come to realize some mistakes he had made in the previous battles. After careful pondering and consideration of the two sword techniques he had used, he had actually improved quite a bit further.

Ning led Autumn Leaf towards the gate of the Metalstone Tribe.

Uncle Dala and a group of tribesmen were there, and they went up to welcome him. Leading the tribesmen was a balding old man with white hair. The balding old man walked over and bowed repeatedly with respect. "I, Tyson of the Metalstone Tribe, would like to thank you, mighty young master, for having repeatedly saved the lives of the tribesmen of my Metalstone Tribe. All the clansmen of the Metalstone Tribe feel boundless gratitude for you...and we've been waiting for your return."

Ning smiled and nodded. "I'll stay with your Metalstone Tribe for a period of time. As for 'rescued', all I did was help out in passing. Also...for now, I don't want to be disturbed."

"Understood, understood." The balding old man nodded repeatedly.

"Dala." Ning looked over.

The tall, powerful, bear-like Uncle Dala hurriedly stepped forward, seemingly very excited. "Young master, when I saw that you returned, I..."

"It's alright." Ning laughed. "You helped me for a month in Eastmount Marsh. I told you that when I returned to the Metalstone Tribe, I would definitely reward you heavily. Take this." As he spoke, within his hands, three 'beastheads' of gold appeared. He tossed it over, each beasthead weighing ten pounds. This bear-like Uncle Dala instantly was stupefied.

And then, he hurriedly caught them all, while the surrounding tribesmen all stared at him with envy.

"Let's go." Ning looked at Mowu and Autumn Leaf, then headed straight into the Metalstone Tribe.

Ning could easily have given an even more valuable gift, but to a small tribe like the Metalstone Tribe, which had barely a thousand people, truly valuable treasures might cause a disaster instead!

Within the Metalstone Tribe.

"Young master." Autumn Leaf poured some fruit wine for Ning, then offered him some fruit and some delicacies. "Mowu and I have been in this tribe for a month now. Not soon after arriving, we got in touch with our Ji clan."

"Right." Ning nodded.

While adventuring, every month he had to reach out to and contact the scattered troops of the Ji clan of the Western Prefecture who were stationed in various places throughout the area.

"There is a letter from the West Prefecture City." Autumn Leaf withdrew a scroll from her sleeves.

Ning accepted it. He rolled the yellow parchment open, and as he did, he couldn't help but reveal a smile. This was a letter his mother had personally written to him! The letter didn't contain too much; it mainly just consisted of some words of concern. But having just experienced a life-and-death battle, the nagging of his mother actually filled Ning's heart with a sense of warmth.

"Enough, Autumn Leaf. It looks as though it's been many days since you had a good rest. Go get some rest." Ning said.

"I'm not tired." Autumn Leaf hurriedly said.

"Go." Ning ordered.

Autumn Leaf hurriedly lowered her head, obediently going back to her own room to get some rest.

Time moved on. Every ten days or so, he would make a trip to Eastmount Marsh. Most of the time, though, Ning remained within the Metalstone Tribe, practicing his sword techniques. In the blink of an eye, over a month had passed.

Ning was currently seated on the eaves of his house, holding a bamboo reed that was filled with fine fruit wine. "Although West Prefecture City is large, it isn't as comfortable as these small tribes."

Resting at sundown, heading out at sunrise.

The Metalstone Tribe showed great solidarity. Everyone helped each other, and they all treated each other like brothers.

"Quick, quick, quick."

"Everyone, go back."

"Quick, bundle everything up."

Suddenly, the formerly peaceful tribe instantly became a chaotic bedlam of activity. This caused Ning, who was drinking wine leisurely on the top of his building, to grow confused. He immediately leapt down from the building, then grabbed one of the running youths.

"You."

"Young master." The youth, seeing that it was Ning who grabbed him, immediately greeted him respectfully.

"What's going on?" Ning asked. "Why did the tribe suddenly turn so chaotic? Weren't you training in spear-fighting just now? Why did you stop?"

"The people of the Blackmount Tribe are coming!" The youth hurriedly said. "The people of Blackmount Tribe have come to collect furs from us. We need to hide some of the finer furs which the tribe has, as otherwise, if the Blackmount Tribe discovers them, they'll take them for their own. That would be terrible. Young master, I need to get back immediately..."

Ning, understanding, nodded. "Go ahead."

Autumn Leaf was watching this from in front of the building as well. She spoke out, "The Blackmount Tribe is an extremely large tribe with tens of thousands of tribesmen. Each year, these smaller tribes will have to offer them some tribute."

"Hmph." Ning frowned. "This land belongs to the Ji clan! Only my Ji clan has the right to levy taxes. If the Blackmount Tribe is forcing the nearby, smaller tribes to pay them tribute, isn't that the same as levying a tax?"

The Ji clan levied and collected taxes from every singlet tribe within its borders.

At the same time, the Ji clan itself was a subject of the Grand Xia Dynasty, and so most of the tax they collected had to be delivered to

the Grand Xia Dynasty!

"In principle, yes." Autumn Leaf shook her head. "But how would these smaller tribes dare to refuse? If they were to refuse, the Blackmount Tribe is completely capable of utterly destroying them, then selling off the captives as slaves."

Ning let out a long sigh.

Right.

Because there were too many tribes, there was no way for the Ji clan to manage all of the internecine squabbles between the tribes, so they usually left them to their own devices. Not just the Ji clan...even the Grand Xia Dynasty, who ruled over an enormous, boundless expanse of territory, had to govern in a loose fashion. Wasn't the Ji clan and the Ironwood clan also in a state of war, viewing each other as deadly enemies? If one's territory was too large, it became hard to govern!

"They are coming." Autumn Leaf said. "The Blackmount Tribe's tribesmen are coming."

Ning looked over as well. He saw that from afar, a group of half-armored, pelt-clad tribesmen were currently strutting around in the area, looking around as if they were in territory which belonged to them. The leader of the Metalstone Tribe, Uncle Dala, and the others were all by their sides, obediently following them, not daring to disobey them at all.

The leader of this Blackmount squad, Braveshell, was currently viewing this little tribe with satisfaction.

"Hmph." Braveshell glanced at the nearby Metalstone tribesmen. Seeing the frightened, supplicatory looks on their faces, he couldn't help but feel even more delighted.

Even within the Blackmount Tribe, he was a high level, central figure. In a small tribe like this Metalstone Tribe...he could act as he wished!

If he was angered, this entire tribe would probably be finished. The hundred guards he had brought with him could probably destroy this sort of small tribe all by themselves. In this sort of small tribe, he had absolute authority.

"Huh?" Braveshell suddenly saw that not too far away, there was a young man and a girl standing together. Braveshell's eyes instantly lit up. The guards by his side, looking along with him, couldn't help but hold their breaths as well.

"Beautiful. Mesmerizing." Braveshell was instantly stunned, and then his heart was instantly overwhelmed with powerful lust and desire. He definitely had to seize this beautiful girl and make her his personal maidservant. Every day, he would definitely 'bestow his affections' on her! Just thinking about it made Braveshell feel the blood pumping through his entire body.

"Hahaha..." Laughing loudly, Braveshell walked directly towards the young man and the girl.

Ning frowned slightly as he looked at this tall man walking towards him, who was wearing some exquisitely crafted ornaments. The tall men swept Ning and Autumn Leaf with a gaze, as though he were a high ranking tribesman inspecting some goods. In particular, he didn't disguise the greedy look in his eyes when he was staring at Autumn Leaf. "Your fur clothes were cut and stitched so exquisitely. Did you make it yourself, miss? Your handiwork is quite fine. The fur clothes of the youngster next to you is stitched and cut very nicely as well. Is he your little brother?"

Chapter 17 – Sword Energy Flying Everywhere

“Impudent!” Autumn Leaf’s voice rang out.

Braveshell raised his jaw slightly. “Impudent? This tiny little Metalstone Tribe...I can do what I wish to it, much less ‘impudent’. I’ll tell you the truth. I’ve taken a fancy to you. Follow me obediently. The last time I took a fancy to a girl, that girl was quite stubborn. She preferred to commit suicide than follow me, so I wiped out her entire family, and sold off her entire clan as slaves! For your little brother here, and your clansmen, you need to make a good decision!”

Tribesfolk were straightforward individuals. They weren’t very calculating, but at the same time, they were very bloodthirsty. Most of them didn’t fear death, especially beautiful girls like the one in front of him right now. They were definitely the shining jewels of their tribes, and generally they were all very prideful. It was quite common for such beautiful girls to rather commit suicide than to submit to others, once their pride took hold of them. Braveshell didn’t want to see this happen.

“Venerable Lord Braveshell.” The balding elder, Tyson, hurriedly urged him, “These three do not belong to my Metalstone Tribe. There come from a very large tribe!”

“A large tribe?” Braveshell’s eyebrows twitched. “No wonder. I was just wondering how a place like your Metalstone Tribe could produce such a graceful young lady. Miss, tell me what tribe you belong to.” As he spoke, he moved two steps forward, wanting to stroke Autumn Leaf’s face. Autumn Leaf directly delivered a lightning-fast kick to him.

Bang!

This heavy kick was powered by rage, and it struck heavily upon Braveshell’s chest. Not only did it shatter the ornaments covering his chest, it also sent Braveshell falling back over his head.

"Impudent!"

"Clang!"

The Blackmount guards instantly shouted in anger, and some of them even drew their blades.

Braveshell quickly climbed up. He wiped away a hint of blood from the corner of his mouth, then reached out to stop his guards. All his guards knew exactly how vicious and diabolical Braveshell could be, for him to have become a high level, core member of a tribe as large as the Blackmount tribe.

"It's all over."

"This young miss is going to suffer a terrible fate."

The guards all understood that when Braveshell was clearly furious but temporarily suppressed his anger, it only represented...that Braveshell was truly livid! He was currently considering how to vent his fury!

Braveshell was on his feet now. His eyes were narrowed, staring at the three like a poisonous viper. He slowly said, "That kick was rather heavy. Can you let me know where the three of you have come from, exactly? Is it a large tribe, or is it the mighty Ji clan?"

"Take a good look." Mowu stepped forward coldly, revealing with a flip of his hand an emblem.

The emblem had a single word on it: Ji!

"Ji!"

Many of the faces of the surrounding guards changed. They all looked at their leader, Braveshell, whose face had turned ashen. He hurriedly bowed in terror, "I didn't expect that I would accidentally offend you. Please pardon me."

Mowu's eyes contained a hint of pity in them, because he knew how much his young master hated evildoers.

Autumn Leaf also glanced coldly at Braveshell. Ever since Braveshell said that he had once destroyed a small tribe for the sake of seizing a girl, and sold off all the tribesmen as slaves, Autumn Leaf had felt utter revulsion for him. Because she herself had been sold off after her tribe had been destroyed.

Ji Ning simply looked at Braveshell. In an instant, he had already determined that he would punish Braveshell with death!

Braveshell had destroyed an entire tribe for no cause? When Ning thought of how the women and children in that tribe had died miserable deaths or had been sold, Ning's heart was filled with boundless rage! Although this area contained many hidden evildoers, and Ning couldn't possibly stop them all, when he encountered them, he could never suppress the fury he felt!

"Hahaha..." Braveshell, whose face had been ashen, suddenly cracked his lips and laughed, laughed brightly. "It seems the three of you already have a killing intention. I really don't know if I should call you stupid or arrogant!"

"Oh?" Ning frowned slightly.

Braveshell continued to laugh. "So what if you are of the Ji clan? How many youngsters of the Five Prefectures of the Ji clan go out adventuring as part of their coming-of-age, and how many of them have died! How could the Ji clan possibly discover...if their clansmen were killed by monstrous beasts, or by other tribesmen?"

"Even if you have a high status, in this place, you are nothing more than three people. Thus, even if you want to kill me, you should hide it in your hearts...as the books say, 'distant water cannot quench a nearby drought'. No matter what your status is, no one will be able to save you." Braveshell sighed. "I still remember how three years ago, I once enjoyed a young girl of the Ji clan. Her skin was truly fine. My

servants all enjoyed her as well, and afterwards, we fed her to the beasts who ate her clean!"

"Do you understand now?" Braveshell's eyes were shining. "Status doesn't represent power. At least in this place, I am the one who determines your life and death!"

"Everyone."

Braveshell raised his head and said in a loud voice. "Make your move. Kill the two men, spare the woman! After I enjoy her first, each of you will have your chance!"

"Wooo!"

"Kill!"

"Haha, let's do it!"

Braveshell's guards all drew out their blades and swords, valiantly charging forward. The high level military leaders of large tribes trusted their own servants and slaves the most. Whether it was Ji Lee or Ji Yichuan, they all had their own trusted servants and slaves, who would definitely obey them without question.

Under Braveshell's orders, these guards, who were born into his servitude, all dared to charge forward and kill!

"How dare you!" Suddenly, a voice rang out like spring thunder, exploding in the skies.

In the skies above, there was someone standing atop an enormous flying bird. That person drew out his longsword and brandished it downwards. In but a second, sword energy criss-crossed everywhere...one ray of sword energy after another rained down, and each blow of sword energy pierced through a guard, easily chopping their bodies apart, sending fresh blood spewing everywhere.

"Aaaaah!" "Nooooooooo!" "Aaaaah!"

All sorts of miserable cries rang out, but soon, everything became silent again.

The hundred-plus servant guards, who had been shouting savagely, all collapsed on the ground. Some had large holes in their chest, while others had been chopped apart. Blood stained the ground. All of them had died miserable deaths! But not a single one of the utterly terrified tribesmen of the Metalstone Tribe had been struck.

"But...but...but..." Braveshell had thought that everything was under his control, but now, his face turned ashen. He stood there numbly, staring at his dead servants, and then at the man standing on the giant bird in mid-air. He stuttered, "Xian...Xiantian..."

The people of the Metalstone Tribe all raised their heads. Some were dumbfounded, others were awestruck, while some of the girls in particular just stared unblinkingly.

Ning, Autumn Leaf, and Mowu all raised their head to take a look as well.

Swoosh!

The man jumped down from his mid-air position on the back of the giant bird, landing on the ground.

"Young master." The man bowed slightly as he said to Ning, demonstrating his respect for Ning.

This scene caused all the members of the Metalstone Tribe, as well as Braveshell, feel stunned. Because just then, those lines of energy attacks represented that this person was a Xiantian lifeform! A Xiantian lifeform, in any tribe, no matter how large, was definitely a person of the highest status. Even in the Ji clan, they were high level, core members!

Generally speaking, the adventuring youths of the Ji clan who

encountered Xiantian lifeforms all had to pay their respects first. But this Xiantian lifeform was actually paying his respects to this youngster?

"Spare me." Braveshell threw himself forward, kneeling in front of Ning, begging, "Mighty young master, those words that I said earlier were all wild ravings. I've never done such a thing! In addition, once, when I was collecting furs from some small tribes, I acquired a special treasure. It definitely is a magic treasure! As to what type of magic treasure it is, I don't understand either...as long as you are willing to spare me, young master, I am willing to give this magic treasure..."

Before he even finished speaking.

Hu.

Braveshell suddenly threw himself towards Ning, his right hand forming a claw, wanting to rip out Ning's throat. At such a close range...generally speaking, even late stage Houtian experts would find it hard to dodge.

"Hrmph." With a casual wave of his hand, despite striking out later, Ning's hand slapped down onto Braveshell's skull before Braveshell finished his attack. Braveshell's body trembled, and then blood began pouring out of his nose and his ears, and his body weakly tumbled to the ground.

"He's a sly one." Ning said softly.

This Braveshell really was both crafty and vicious, venomous and diabolical, daring to do anything. Even though he knew that his chance of dealing with the Xiantian level person was low, he immediately made the decision to first use the magic treasure to try and attract Ning's interest...and then try to capture Ning. As long as he could take Ning hostage, he would have a chance at life.

Unfortunately...

Ning was someone who could kill even Diremonsters with ease.

"So him and those guards were all on the same side." The Xiantian level man said with a laugh. "Those guards were all half-armored, while this person was dressed in furs...I hadn't noticed him."

"Thank you for your assistance, elder apprentice-brother." Ning said with a laugh.

The man in front of him was one of the nine major disciples which his father, Ji Yichuan, had trained. His name was Wanfang, and he was an early Xiantian lifeform. Within the Ji clan of the West Prefecture, his status was fairly high, but at his current level of power, he wasn't quite eligible yet to take command over the black armored riders, while Ning, being the next Prefecture Lord, had an extremely high status.

"If you had been the one to act, young master, things would have gone just as easily." Wanfang sheathed his longsword while laughing. "But I came here for an important reason."

"Important reason?" Ning's face changed. He kept in touch with the West Prefecture once a month. The person who had come this time was his own elder apprentice-brother. One could imagine how important the reason was, for a Xiantian expert to personally make the journey.

"Let's chat inside." Ning said hurriedly.

Ning glanced at the still-shocked Metalstone Tribesmen. "Dispose of the corpses. As for the Blackmount Tribe...in a little while, I'll ask my elder apprentice-brother to make a trip to the Blackmount Tribe. You naturally won't have anything to worry about."

"Thank you, young master!"

The balding elder and the others all hurriedly fell to their knees. Only now did they understand how exalted Ning's status truly was. For even a Xiantian lifeform to greet him with respect...a person like

this, even the chieftain of the Blackmount Tribe would have to kneel before!

Ning and Wanfang quickly entered the stone room, then closed the door.

"Quick."

"Quick, clean it up."

The people of the Metalstone Tribe were filled with pumping blood as they looked at the corpses on the ground. They felt both nervous and excited. Normally, they had to all but worship the ground on which these terrifying Blackmount tribesmen walked on, but now, all of them lay here dead.

"So even you will have an ending like this." That cold, one-armed man gave a savage kick to the corpse of Braveshell, his eyes filled with rage and hate.

Within the room.

Only Ning and Wanfang were present.

"Elder apprentice-brother, what is the matter?" Ning asked. "Why did you come here?"

"Because of the Diremonster, Serpentwing!" Wanfang's face was solemn.

Chapter 18 – Yin and Yang Twin Energy Formation

“The Diremonster, Serpentwing?” Ji Ning frowned. “What happened? Our Ji clan of the West Prefecture should have people stationed at Serpentwing Lake, with multiple Xiantian experts present. Could it be that Serpentwing has escaped Serpentwing Lake?”

Wanfang shook his head. “If he had simply escaped from Serpentwing Lake, that would be a minor affair! Alas, our Ji clan of the West Prefecture actually ended up helping out Serpentwing. Our Xiantian experts stationed at Serpentwing Lake constantly tried to kill him whenever possible, causing Serpentwing’s every day to be filled with danger. There were several major battles as well! Under that pressure...Serpentwing actually reached the peak of the Xiantian level!”

“What?! Peak Xiantian level?!” Ning was shocked.

A peak Xiantian level Diremonster was truly dangerous. Even Eastmount Marsh had only a single peak Xiantian level Diremonster, that Ancient Snow Toad!

“The Xiantian level experts of our Ji clan of the West Prefecture were only able to just barely survive through relying on their magic treasures. They had to just watch as Serpentwing disappeared!”

Wanfang sighed. “As soon as he heard this news, Master immediately went in pursuit!”

“Father went in pursuit?” Ning nodded.

Wanfang nodded as well. “But that Serpentwing can both soar in the skies as well as dive into the seas. His speed is now much faster than before, and as soon as he enters the deep water, even a Zifu Disciple would find it hard to kill him. Master understood this as well, and this pursuit of his ended in failure. Thus, he ordered me to tell you of this affair and to make sure that you are careful. After all, previously, you killed his child.”

"Understood." Ning nodded solemnly. "It seems I need to leave this Metalstone Tribe now. Serpentwing, hrmpf, I didn't expect he'd survive this long, much less make a breakthrough!"

"This sort of old monster who has been training for thousands of years has accumulated significant experience. It isn't strange for him to make a breakthrough at last." Wanfang then said, "That's all there is to report. My mission is now complete."

Ning hurriedly advised him, "Apprentice brother Wanfang, those people you executed earlier belong to the Blackmount Tribe, located not far from here. Go help me rap their knuckles a bit!"

"Just leave this sort of minor task to me." Wanfang nodded.

.....

That very day, Ning led Autumn Leaf and Mowu out of the Metalstone Tribe. As to where he was headed...Ning didn't inform anyone. Only by acting in such a way would he make it harder for Serpentwing to find him.

A month after the Serpentwing Disaster, everything was calm again.

Originally, after Serpentwing broke through to the peak Xiantian level, he charged out of Serpentwing Lake, beginning to vent his fury upon the area, causing great harm to the nearby tribes and devouring many humans, filling countless tribesmen with fear. He boldly went out in search of Ning, but the news that Ning was adventuring was a secret which few knew. Given that Ning himself was extremely vigilant as well, Serpentwing naturally couldn't find him!

After half a month, Serpentwing encountered Ji Yichuan. Relying on his vastly increased strength, Serpentwing confidently did battle with him, but he didn't expect that once again, he would be badly injured. Still, his flying speed was much faster than before, and

when he fled for his life, even Yichuan wasn't able to do anything to him. This battle resulted in Serpentwing coming to a decision; he never wanted to fight against Yichuan ever again. If he saw Yichuan, he would immediately run far away.

Another month later, Poisondove Ridge stepped in!

The Five Prefectures of the Ji clan negotiated with Poisondove Ridge, and the end result was...The Diremonster, Serpentwing, is forbidden to leave Serpentwing Lake for a hundred years!"

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Time passed. In the blink of an eye, summer arrived.

Within Eastmount Marsh.

Two figures lay hidden within the aquatic grass. One was a half-red, half-white man with a vile aura and braided hair, while the other was a muscular man dressed in black.

"The information you have is correct?" The vile-looking man said softly. "We've waited here for three days now."

The black-clothed man nodded. "Recently, there is a youngster who often comes to fight against the Azure Skysnake King. Every ten or fifteen days, they'll do battle. In addition, their battles are generally in the area around here. Don't worry, Master. When the time comes, the Azure Skysnake King will definitely emerge from the depths, and once he enters our formation, he won't be able to escape!"

"Alright." The vile man nodded. "For the sake of this day, I have prepared for so long, and also spent an incredible price in order to acquire this Yin and Yang Twin Energy Formation. This time, we must capture the Azure Skysnake King alive and let it become my spirit beast!"

"Once the Azure Skysnake King enters the formation, its life and death will be entirely determined by you, Master." The black clothed

man said.

"Hahaha..." The vile man laughed gently. "Right. That youth who often fights against the Azure Skysnake King, do you know who he is?"

"I've never seen him." The black clothed man shook his head. "I know all of the young geniuses of our Ironwood clan, and he isn't one of them. It seems as though this youngster's sword techniques are based on the Ji clan's [Raindrop Sutra]."

"Ji clan?" A fierce look flashed through the vile man's eyes. "For him to be able to fight equally at such a young age with the Azure Skysnake King means that when he grows up, he'll most likely become yet another Yichuan...since that's the case, then I, Ironwood Zhan, will give the Ji clan a hand and help them send their genius straight to the Yellow Springs of Hell."

Time passed.

Another half day went by. It was now sunset, and in the distance, a fur-clad youngster appeared, walking atop of the waves.

"Master, he's here!" The black clothed man hurriedly shouted.

Zhan turned and looked. Seeing that Ning was walking on water as though it were flat ground, his pupils shrank. "One with the world!"

"He must die." Zhan's heart was now filled with a killing urge. At such a young age, this person was able to reach the 'one with the world' level. Once this terrifying youngster grew up...he would be far more powerful than even the Raindrop Sword, Ji Yichuan. He might even become the most powerful figure in the Five Prefectures of the Ji clan!"

"Brother An!" Ironwood Zhan hurriedly instructed. "Afterwards, you go deal with that youth. Even if you can't kill him, don't let him get away. After I subdue the Azure Skysnake King, I'll immediately hurry over."

"Yes." The black clothed man said respectfully.

Ironwood Zhan stared grimly into the distance.

To be able to reach the 'one with the world' level as a youth...this sort of monstrous talent was countless times more talented than him, Ironwood Zhan. Fortunately, he, Zhan, had been training for over a hundred years. Relying on his years of accumulated strength, it would still be simplicity itself for him to slay this little child.

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Zhan was hiding within the aquatic grasses, and had secretly set up a formation in the area around this location. Neither their auras nor their voices would penetrate through it. If even their auras couldn't pass through...then of course, there was no way to sense them. Ning, thus, also didn't sense their presence either.

"Little snakey-snake." Ning stood on the surface of the water as he called out. "Still not coming out?"

His voice transmitted directly into the depths of the water.

A moment later.

BOOM!

An enormous emerald serpent erupted forth from the waves, and then its body rapidly shrank to a length of around ten meters, while its head stared, swaying, at Ning while emitting a disdainful snort. Actually, over the course of his multiple battles against Ning, the Azure Skysnake King had gained some insights as well. The Azure Skysnake King had the feeling that he too was about to reach the 'one with the world' level. Although his battle ability was astonishing, he primarily relied on his natural gifts. In terms of skill level, he was inferior to Ji Ning.

This sort of utterly ruthless battles against an opponent, with both using deadly, lethal blows, was the best way for an individual to

improve!

“Once I also reach the ‘one with the world’ level, you will definitely die.” The Azure Skysnake King secretly said to himself.

‘Haha, c’mere, little snakey-snake.’ Two swords appeared out of nowhere in Ning’s hands.

Hua!

The Azure Skysnake King flashed towards him like a bolt of green lightning, while Ning went forward to welcome him.

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Zhan, hiding in the distant aquatic grass, felt even more astonished. “His swordplay is also at the ‘one with the world’ level! And he uses twin swords to such a perfect degree! It seems he isn’t even a Xiantian lifeform yet, but he is able to fight head on with a Xiantian level Godbeast...this sort of talent is absolutely terrifying! He must be destroyed as soon as possible!”

“Why haven’t they entered yet?”

“Almost.” Ironwood Zhan grew frantic with impatience.

He had laid down his formation in advance. Although the formation took up a large amount of space, there was some distance between the formation and Ning’s battle with the Azure Skysnake King.

“Almost...”

Ironwood Zhan’s heart was frantic, but he had to suppress his impatience. Because he knew that once he revealed himself...the frightened Azure Skysnake King would instantly dive into the water, at which point he wouldn’t have any chance at all to deal with him.

All he could do was watch as the distant battle continued.

Sometimes, Ning would be sent flying, while at other times, a wound

would appear on the body of the Azure Skysnake King. The two battled amidst the waves, with Ning constantly gliding atop the waves, sometimes charging forward, other times dodging. On multiple occasions, they almost entered the formation, but the end, they didn't...this truly was nerve wracking.

"Swish."

On one exchange of blows...

"They're in!" Zhan's eyes were red. At this moment, Ning and the Azure Skysnake King had just barely entered the formation. They were at the very edges of it. But Zhan no longer dared to wait any longer. Perhaps in the next moment, Ning and the Azure Skysnake King would once more leave the area of the formation.

"Up!"

Zhan's face was fierce.

"Huh?" Ning, at the borders of the formation, suddenly felt a thrill race through his mind. This was because Ning's soul was already extremely powerful, so much so that he could unconsciously sense any deadly dangers nearby. An invisible terror suddenly filled Ning's head, and he had the feeling that if he didn't move, he might really die!

"Retreat!" Ning glided backwards at maximum speed, and as he did so, he just so happened to leave the edges of the formation.

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As Ning retreated past the edges of the formation, he saw that the surface of the water in front of him suddenly transformed into a scene of chaos. One enormous white energy wave after another appeared, intersecting with enormous black energy waves, creating countless 'nets' covering the area in front of him. The power of this enormous formation made Ning's heart shake.

This was something set up by a late stage Xiantian Ki Refiner, who then suddenly released all the terrifying power he had previously placed in the surrounding area.

"The Azure Skysnake King is within the formation!" Ning's heart clenched. After having battled with this old opponent so many times, seeing that the opponent had fallen into the formation, Ning felt worry for him as well.

"Groooooowl."

A black human figure suddenly flew into the air, transforming into a black Bi'an Tiger that was over thirty meters long. The furry mane around its neck was spread out like an enormous fan, rising up to the heads. Its jade eyes were filled with savage fury, and it pounced directly towards Ning.

"A Bi'an Tiger?!" Ning instantly understood who it was that had set up the massive formation. "The only Xiantian lifeform who has a Bi'an Tiger as his spirit-beast is Ironwood Zhan, of the Ironwood clan! A late-stage Xiantian expert!"

"Gotta go!"

Ning knew very well the difference in power between the two of them. Ironwood Zhan was extremely famous, and was legendary for how sinister he was. When he used his magic treasures, even the Azure Skysnake King was far from being his match!

"Swish!"

Suddenly, a black light shot towards Ning.

With a quick sword stroke and a 'clang' sound, Ning sent the black light flying back towards that Xiantian level Bi'an Tiger. The Bi'an Tiger roared, "Child of the Ji clan, today, shall be the day of your death!"

"Argh!"

A sharp, ear-piercing scream of pain shook the heavens, emanating from within that formation. Ning couldn't help but feel his heart shudder as well. He knew that this was the desolate cry of the Azure Skysnake King. Despite having fought with Ning for so long, the Azure Skysnake King had never before let out such a miserable sound. Clearly, it truly was in dire straits this time.

"Little green snake, I hope you'll be able to survive this affair." Ning could only silently pray. Not daring to hesitate at all, he immediately began to flee across the surface of the lake while blocking the furious attacks of that Xiantian level Bi'an Tiger.

Glossary

PEOPLE:

Gods:

Pangu : The creator deity who made the universe, the Fiendgod of Primordial Chaos.

Nuwa : The creator of humans, currently supposedly the most powerful god in existence and the only one to reach Pangu's level.

Cui Jue : The Lord of Cui Palace, the First Judge of the Dead. Also from Earth.

Grandma Meng : Dispenses her special 'elixir' in the land of the dead, which causes the dead to forget their memories before being reincarnated.

Ji Clan :

Ji Ning : The main character of this novel.

Ji Yichuan : The father of Ning, nicknamed the 'Raindrop Sword'. Number one expert of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture.

Yuchi Snow : The mother of Ning. Member of the Yuchi clan.

Ji Ninefire : The Patriarch of all five prefectures of the Ji clan.

Ji Young : The Prefecture Lord of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture.

Ji Lee : Nicknamed the 'Fire God', the number two expert of the Ji clan of the West Prefecture. Leads a faction opposed to Prefecture Lord Young.

Ji Jadewich : The son of Ji Lee.

Ji Grizzly : The adoptive son of Ji Lee, had been taken in as an infant by a grizzly bear monster.

Ji Redflower : Friend of Ji Yichuan, rides an Azure Firebird.

Spring Grass : Also known as 'Miwa'. One of the two maidservants of Ning who took care of him as he grew up.

Blacktooth : The father of Spring Grass, and the chief of Blacktooth

Tribe.

Autumn Leaf : One of the two maidservants of Ning who took care of him as he grew up.

Blindfish : The number one archery expert, serves the Ji clan.

Mowu: An experienced Ninefang Warrior, loyal to Ji Yichuan. Follows Ning on his first adventure along with Autumn Leaf.

Ironwood Clan

Ironwood Zhan: A late Ki Refiner Xiantian expert of the Ironwood clan. Has a Bi'an Tiger as his spirit beast. Wielded the **Blackwood Vinewhip** as his weapon.

Miscellaneous

Juhua Immortal : A powerful Loose Immortal who lived for millions of years. Controlled an Immortal estate which he was the third master of.

Rampart : The disciple of the Juhua Immortal. Died somewhere.

CREATURES:

Godbeasts :

Armored Wurm : A dragon type Godbeast that seems to be like an Ankylosaurus.

Whitewater Hound : A large, snow-white hound-type creature. Ji Yichuan has one, who once saved Ning and Snow.

Emerald Skyserpent: A serpent-type Godbeast, one of the more powerful creatures in Eastmount Marsh. Fought against Ning several times when Ning was at the peak Houtian stage. Capable of 'Void Blink' upon reaching the 'one with the world' level.

Howling Moonwolf :

Earthquake Rhino :

Redclawed Goldenraven :

Thundersea Owl :

Landwyrm :**Other Monsters :**

Serpentwing : A named late Xiantian level winged serpent, lives in Serpentwing Lake.

Azure Firebird : A flying fire-type bird-type monster. One is in service to the Ji clan of the West Prefecture.

ITEMS:

Dao Battle-Armor: A type of armor that allows multiple users to join their strength together.

Dao-seal : A magic scroll imbued with certain powers, such as the 'Divine Movement Seal', 'Light Body Seal', and more.

Kalestone : A naturally occurring gemstone which is like a 'bag of holding', able to store a certain amount of materials in an extradimensional space.

Goldstar Shirt : A naturally occurring treasure which protects against all attacks below the Xiantian level.

Darknorth swords : A set of three swords, extremely sharp. Originally a damaged 'magic treasure' of the 'flying sword' variety that was ranked. Purchased by Ning.

Blackwood Vinewhip : A magic treasure previously held by Ironwood Zhan.

Traceless Talisman : A single-use talisman that can allow a person to travel ten thousand kilometers in an instant.

TECHNIQUES:**Sword Techniques:****Possessed by the Ji Clan :**

[Raindrop Sutra]: The most defensive of the Ji clan. The technique

which Ji Yichuan became famous for using, thus being nicknamed the 'Raindrop Sword'. Includes the attacks: 'Drizzling Rain', 'Rain Line', 'Raindrop Pierces Rocks', 'Thin Streams Flow Forever', 'Tempest Curtain', 'Watertight', 'Eternally Fresh Waterflow', 'Merciless Waterflow' .

[Thunderflame Sword]: The most offensive technique of the Ji clan. Only three stances were found in the burnt manual, but despite that, is incredibly powerful. No defensive stances. Includes the attacks: *Thunderflash Flint, Blazing Thunderclap, Moth Flies Into the Flame* .

[Polaris Secret Manual]: A very balanced, orthodox technique, part of the [Polaris Sword Manual].

[Illusion Sutra]: An insidious technique that could be applied to any weapon. Allowed one to hide their true powers and actions.

[Melody of 10000 Swords]: The first 'elite' swordplay the Ji clan obtained, which they themselves developed. The most complicated, yet also the simplest when mastered.

Formation Techniques

Yin Yang Twin Energy Formation : A formation which Ironwood Zhan of the Ironwood clan had, set up by using eight formation flags. Very powerful at the Xiantian level.

Lesser Thousand Sword Formation : A formation of an enemy of the Juhua Immortal, uses up to hundreds of sword-type magic treasures.

Fiendgod Body Refining Techniques :

Possessed by the Ji Clan :

[Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens]: The technique Ning chooses. The unquestioned best Fiendgod Body Refining, but also the hardest to learn. One has to be able to sense the Great Yang (Sun) and the Great Ying (Moon), then absorb their energies. If one is extremely suited, the first time training it, small balls of energy will appear in the trainer's hands, with the left having the 'Moon' with a picture of an 'Osmanthus Tree', while the right would have the 'Sun' with a picture of the 'Golden Crow'.

[Calamity Fiend] , [Indestructible Blood Fiend], [Song of the Inferno], [Vajra Buddhist Sutras], [Freeform Soul] , [Eternal Mysteries of the Yellow Earth] , [Spirit Fox Sutra] , [Sutra of the Future Buddha]

Footwork Techniques:

Shadewind Steps : A unique set of footwork techniques which only Ning's mother, Yuchi Snow, knows. Taught to Ning.

Windwing Evasion : Another set of footwork techniques which only Ning's mother, Yuchi Snow, knows. Can only be trained at the Xiantian level.

Divine Abilities:

Kuafu Sunchaser :

72 Transformations :

Three Heads, Six Arms :

Houyi Shooting the Sun :

Heavenly Transformation: Windwing Evasion (see above)

Other Techniques:

Nuwa Painting visualization technique : A soul-strengthening visualization technique taught by Lord Cui. Supposedly an elite skill even in the Deva realm, much less the mortal realms.

Inner Visualization of the Shining Sun-Moon Buddha : The visualization technique used by the Juhua Immortal.

Waterflame Lotus : A technique which Ning develops during a night of meditation by a pool through a hint of the Dao which he came to understand.

LOCATIONS:

Grand Xia Dynasty : The empire which rules over the entire world. Trillions of years old.

Stillwater Commandery: The Commandery region in which Swallow

Mountain is located. Controlled by the Marquisate of Stillwater.

Dark North Sea : The unending ocean in the north of the world.

Where Yichuan and Snow met and conceived Ning.

Swallow Mountain : A massive area, where Ji clan of the West Prefecture is one of the local hegemons.

Serpentwing Lake : A large lake a hundred kilometers long in the Swallow Mountain Area. Lair to the Xiantian monster, Serpentwing.

Eastmount Marsh : A large marsh with a lake in the middle of it. Home to many Xiantian level Diremonsters.

TERMS AND PHRASES:

Power Levels :

Houtian : Lifespan of a hundred years.

Xiantian : Lifespan of two hundred years. 'Diremonster' is a term used to refer to monsters who have reached this level.

Zifu : The 'Violet Palace'. At this level, one will be addressed as Zifu Disciple. Lifespan of five hundred years. Generally capable of 'dividing the mind'

Wanxiang : 'Myriad Manifestations'. At this level, one will be addressed as Wanxiang Adept. Lifespan of eight hundred years. Generally capable of 'divine will', which allows them to control objects with their mind.

Primordial : Can be referred to as Primordial Daoist. Generally capable of 'divine sense', an extrasensory ability.

Void : Can be referred to as 'Land Immortal', or 'Earthly Immortal'. In the later levels of the Void stage, a heavenly tribulation will test them. If they fail, then they will die and their spirits will be extinguished. If a Primordial's body is destroyed but manages to escape with his soul, then he will become a 'Loose Immortal', whose power is roughly on par with the 'Earth Immortals'.

Celestial Immortal : Only at this stage can one be considered to have ascended beyond the Three Realms and no longer be formed by the Five Elements!

Insight Levels:

Basic => Advanced => 'One With the World' => 'True Meaning of the Dao' => 'Dao Realm' => 'Dao Path'

The Greater Universe :

Three Realms : The 'Heaven' Realm, the 'Mortal Realm', and the 'Netherworld Kingdom Realm'

Six Realms of Reincarnation : Deva, Asura (these two are Heaven realm), Human, Animal (these two are 'Mortal' realm), Preta Ghost, Hell (these two are 'Netherworld Kingdom' realm)

Book of Life and Death : The book on which every person's fate is written, their birth, their life, and their death. A person can change their fate by their actions, however. Controlled by Lord Cui.

Miscellaneous Terms and Phrases:

Beasthead : Used to refer to an amount of gold that weighed ten pounds in the world where Ning was born into for his second life.

Fiendgod : Powerful creatures that were born from nature itself and possess unbelievable might. The creator of the universe, Pangu, was himself a Fiendgod.

Godbeasts : Monstrous beasts that have the lineage of the Fiendgods in them. Far more powerful than normal beasts.

Fiendgod Body Refining Technique : Techniques meant to build up the body and make it as powerful as a Fiendgod's. Far more powerful than Ki Refining of the same level. Cannot utilize magic treasures unless also training in Ki Refining.

Ki Refining technique : Techniques meant to build up internal ki energy, which allows one to use magic treasures at the Xiantian level.

Ninefang Warriors : A term for peak Houtian level warriors in the Swallow Mountain region.

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